Guitarist
Issue 495
MARCH 2023

Jeff Beck

1944–2023

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A 23-page tribute to the life & music of Jeff Beck

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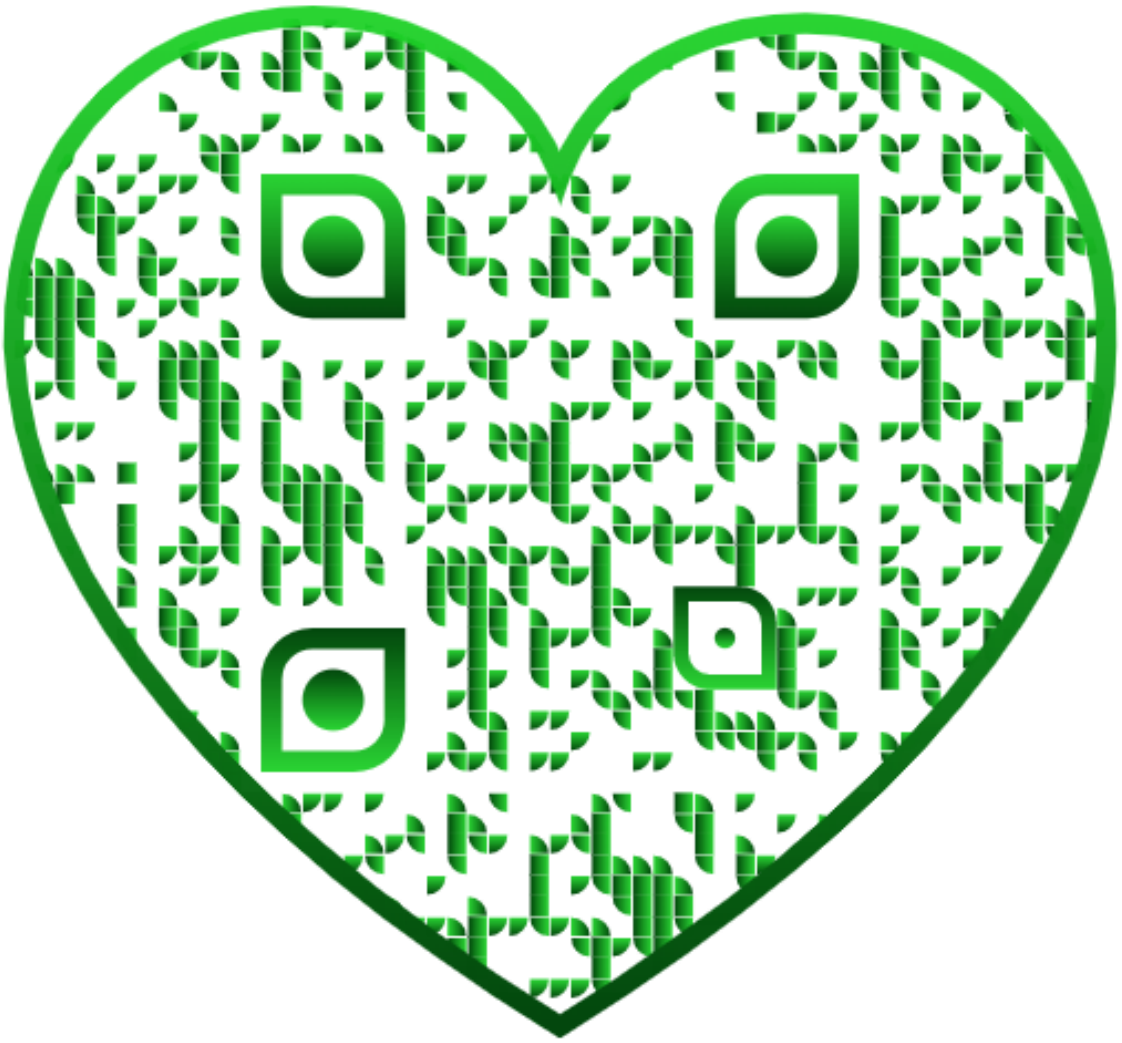

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A Class Of His Own

In 1968 and '69, the legendary French yachtsman Bernard Moitessier was sailing in the prestigious Golden Globe Race for the fastest solo circumnavigation of the planet by sail. He stood to win a large prize pot and instant fame if he won the race and was well placed to do so. However, after rounding Cape Horn, he pulled alongside a passing ship and used a slingshot to fire a message onto its deck. It contained a statement to the effect that he was pulling out of the race, with immediate effect "because I am happy at sea and perhaps to save my soul". Then he set a course for the Pacific, with no other goal than complete freedom.

It's a fitting coincidence that, almost at the same time, Jeff Beck released his first solo album with The Jeff Beck Group, entitled *Truth*, after leaving The Yardbirds under a cloud of illness and disillusionment (see page 63). Like Moitessier, Beck never wanted to run someone else's race. And if chart success and fame was welcome, it was never his driving force. By his own admission, Beck felt he had failed if he didn't push the art of playing guitar a little further with each record, each tour, each gig. It's also telling that his greatest commercial hit, *Hi Ho Silver Lining*, was also the achievement he was, perhaps, least proud of. For if he never quite matched the giddying celebrity of contemporaries such as Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page, he was rich in a rarer coin: respect.

Few guitarists are so widely admired for sheer virtuosity as Jeff Beck. As he was rarely far from a stage, you could always go and see Jeff Beck play, somewhere or other – for by refusing the straitjacket of commercialism, he never lost his love of playing, or his freedom. Like Moitessier, he was happiest charting his own course. We hope you enjoy this issue's tribute to his life and music.

Jamie Dickson **Editor-in-chief**

Editor's Highlights

Going Underground
As bassist in The Jam, Bruce Foxton formed an uneasy but inspirational alliance with the Modfather, Paul Weller, he explains on **p72**

Modern Classic
The DGT model by PRS, designed for feted US player David Grissom, is now available in affordable new SE spec. Reviewed on **p84**

Black Gold
Dave Friedman has become the go-to maker for hot-rod, British-inspired amps. He tells us why his brutal gain tones have the edge on **p114**

COVER IMAGE BY ROSS HALFIN; BRUCE FOXTON PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Guitarist

Future Publishing Limited, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA
Telephone 01225 442244 Email guitarist@futurenet.com Online www.guitarist.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Editor-In-Chief
Jamie Dickson
jamie.dickson@futurenet.com

Art Editor
Darren Phillips
darren.phillips@futurenet.com

Deputy Editor
David Mead
david.mead@futurenet.com

Reviews Editor
Dave Burrluck
dave@daveburrluck.com

Managing Editor
Lucy Rice
lucy.rice@futurenet.com

Content Director, Music
Scott Rowley
scott.rowley@futurenet.com

Senior Music Editor
Jason Sidwell
jason.sidwell@futurenet.com

Contributors
Tony Bacon, Richard Barrett, Alex Bishop, Rod Brakes, Meg Culliford, Trevor Curwen, Nick Guppy, Martin Holmes, Richard Hood, Denny Ilett, Glenn Kimpton, Neville Marten, Huw Price, Davina Rungasamy, Gary Stuckey, Alvin Weetman, Stuart Williams, Charlie Wilkins, Henry Yates

In-House Photography
Phil Barker, Olly Curtis, Neil Godwin

ADVERTISING
MEDIA PACKS ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST
CHIEF REVENUE DIRECTOR Zack Sullivan zack.sullivan@
UK COMMERCIAL SALES DIRECTOR Clare Dove clare.dove@futurenet.com
ADVERTISING SALES DIRECTOR Lara Jaggon lara.jaggon@futurenet.com
ACCOUNT SALES DIRECTOR Guy Meredith guy.meredith@futurenet.com

MARKETING
DIRECTOR OF ACQUISITIONS Sharon Todd sharon.todd@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ACQUISITIONS Helen Harding helen.harding@futurenet.com
SENIOR CAMPAIGN MANAGER Faith Wardle faith.wardle@futurenet.com
CAMPAIGN MANAGER Rachel Wallace rachel.wallace@futurenet.com
SUBSCRIPTIONS MARKETING EXECUTIVE Oliver Hope oliver.hope@futurenet.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION
HEAD OF PRODUCTION UK & US Mark Constance mark.constance@futurenet.com
PRODUCTION MANAGER Frances Twentyman frances.twentyman@futurenet.com
SENIOR AD PRODUCTION MANAGER Jo Crosby jo.crosby@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS MANAGER Jason Hudson jason.hudson@futurenet.com
DIGITAL EDITIONS PRODUCER Nick Lee nick.lee@futurenet.com

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING & SYNDICATION
GUITARIST IS AVAILABLE FOR LICENSING AND SYNDICATION. TO FIND OUR MORE CONTACT US AT LICENSING@FUTURENET.COM OR VIEW OUR AVAILABLE CONTENT AT WWW.FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM
HEAD OF PRINT LICENSING Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION
HEAD OF FUTURE INTERNATIONAL & BOOKAZINES Tim Mathers

MANAGEMENT
SVP GLOBAL MAGAZINES & MARKETFORCE Adrian Hughes adrian.hughes@futurenet.com
BRAND DIRECTOR Stuart Williams stuart.williams1@futurenet.com
COMMERCIAL FINANCE DIRECTOR Dan Jotcham dan.jotcham@futurenet.com
HEAD OF ART & DESIGN Rodney Dive rodney.dive@futurenet.com
HEAD OF DESIGN (MUSIC) Brad Merrett brad.merrett@futurenet.com
GROUP ART DIRECTOR Graham Dalzell graham.dalzell@futurenet.com

CUSTOMER SERVICES
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Chief Executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

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Fiore
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MARK LETTIERI SIGNATURE MODEL
"All guitarists have a sound in their head – a sound that evolves and grows as they progress, discovering all of the beautiful idiosyncrasies that define their individual voice. To facilitate this process, players need a vibrant, dynamic guitar that becomes a free space in which their personality can unfold. PRS and I designed Fiore to be this guitar."
- Mark Lettieri
PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS
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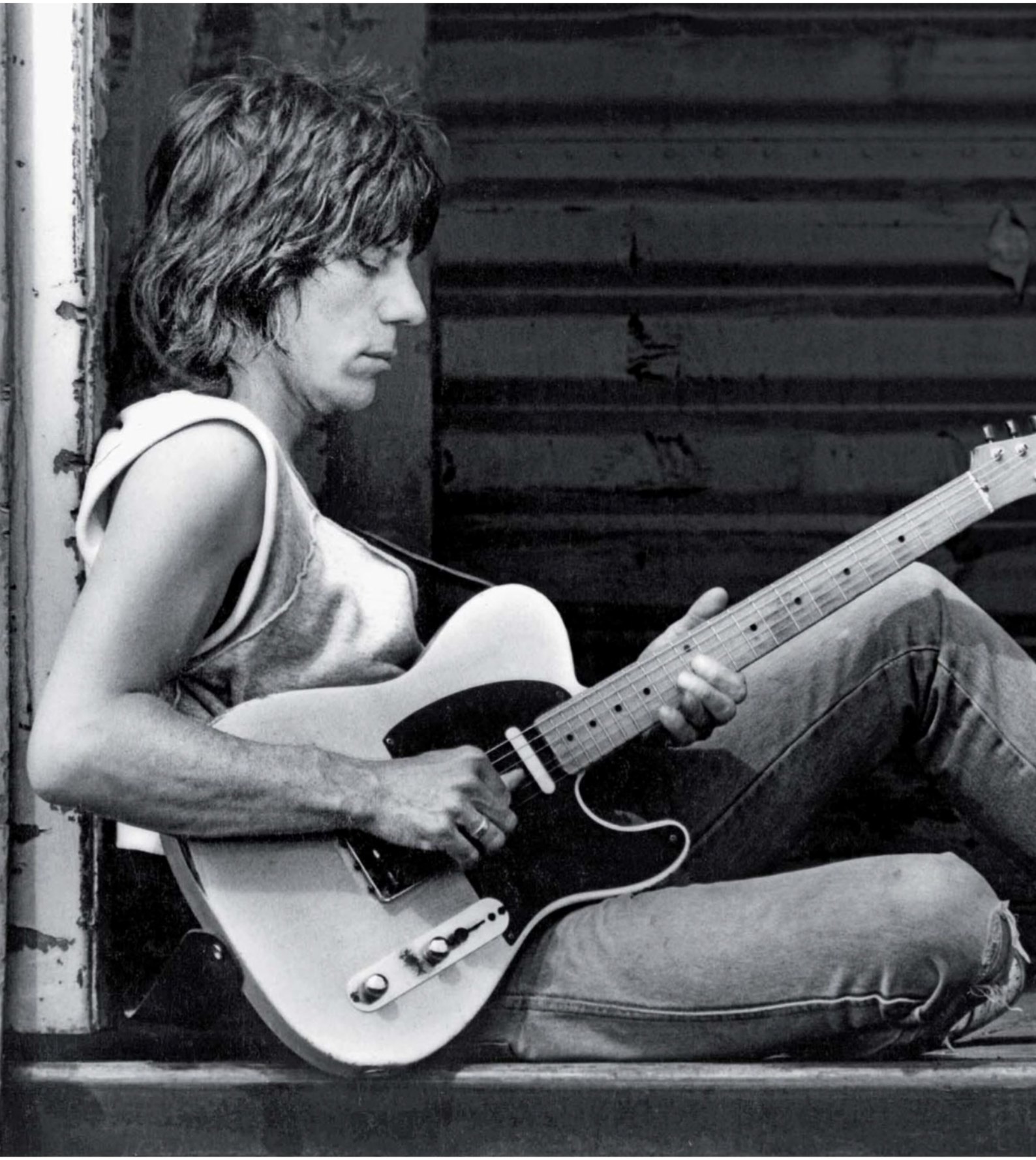

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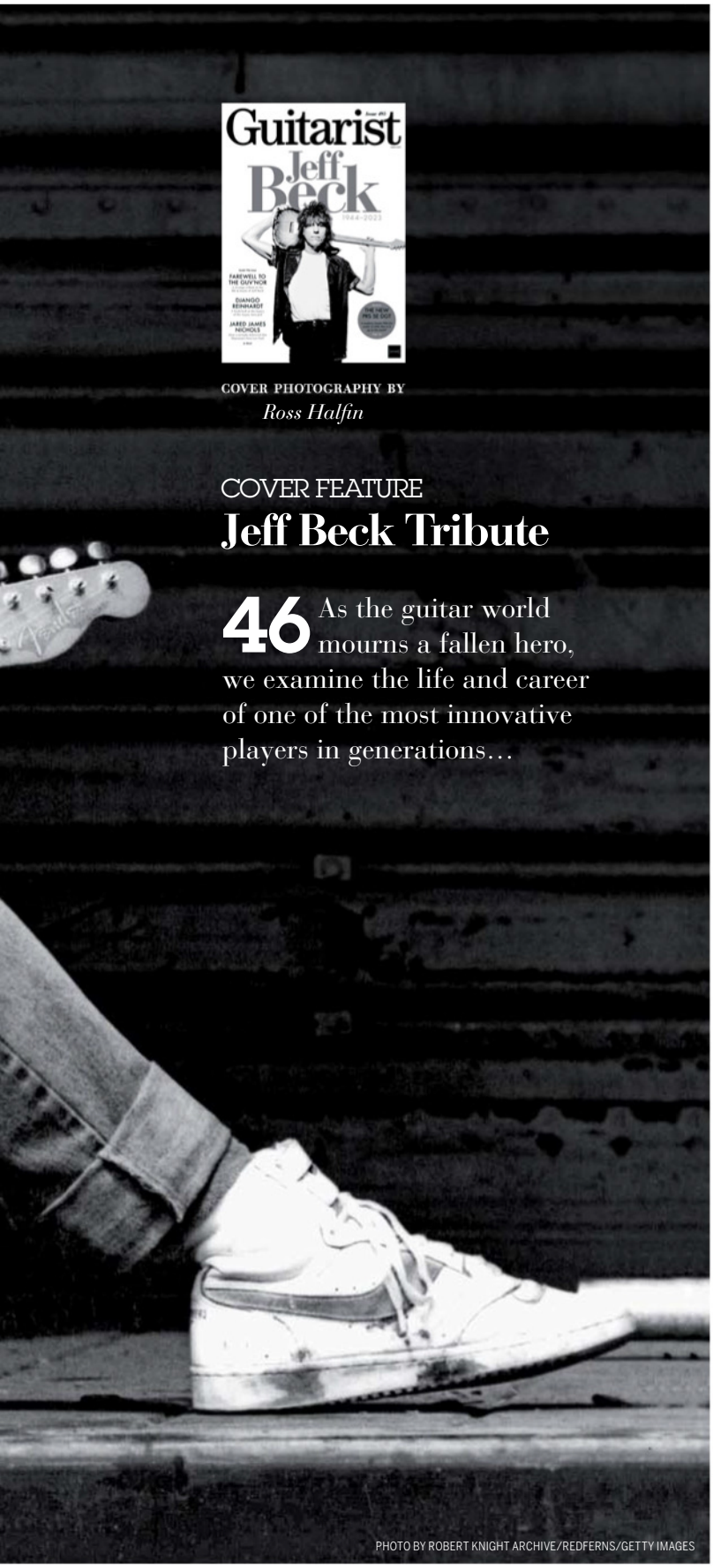

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY
Ross Halfin

COVER FEATURE

Jeff Beck Tribute

46 As the guitar world mourns a fallen hero, we examine the life and career of one of the most innovative players in generations…

PHOTO BY ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

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music radar. SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

GODIN RADIUM-X
£2,699

WHAT IS IT? High-line Canadian-made chambered body, set-neck 'hybrid' electric with Bare Knuckle, Seymour Duncan and LR Baggs pickups

Upping The Ante

Mixing magnetic and piezo pickups, Godin is back with serious intent if this Radium-X is anything to go by. But it comes at a price. Worth a punt? We plug in...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

It's been a while since we featured a Godin electric in these pages, actually just over two years, back in issue 467. And you don't need us to tell you that quite a lot has happened since then. World events, factory shutdowns and the rising price of raw materials, parts and shipping have all played their part. So you have to doff your cap because if Godin is to retain – or, perhaps more accurately, regain – some market share, then this new Radium-X is quite a statement of intent.

Multi-voice, innovative guitars have been a cornerstone of Godin's output over recent decades: instruments built with purpose in mind. The Radium-X falls bang into that category with its blend of pickups – standard magnetic with less-standard piezo – creating a 'hybrid' electric-plus-acoustic platform. But before we get there, there's plenty going on with the instrument itself.

The body shape here has already been used on the standard Radium and Stadium models, a Telecaster-inspired outline with a pulled out bass-side shoulder and slightly thinner treble-side horn. The back is mahogany, two-piece centre-joined, and by tapping our fingernails around the body it sounds like it's fairly extensively chambered on the lower bass side of the

1

body, behind the vibrato rout, and quite extensively on the treble side, too. That hollowed structure, around 36mm deep, is topped with a 15mm thick one-piece swamp ash top that has a shallow violin-like carve, giving an overall depth of 51.6mm and a rim depth of approximately 40mm. Outwardly, the back is carved, too, with a deep ribcage contour that flows into smaller chamfering around the back's edges. The heel is left pretty square but somehow suits the rather classic style: the deep red stain to the mahogany recalls the craft of the jazz-era archtop, as do those nicotine-stained two-piece inlays, which also feature on a trio of new Godin 5th Avenue Jumbo models, the Montreal Premiere Limited and the solidbody Summit Classic.

Finished in Rustic Burst 'semi gloss', it's super smooth to the touch… the deep red recalling the craft of the jazz-era archtop

This evocative vibe continues with the mahogany neck, which has a head-splice around the position of the two lower tuning machines, but you really have to look closely to spot it. That very classic three-a-side headstock is dead classy, although here it's faced with a black/white/black plastic laminate, giving echoes of Godin's Radiator. We've previously criticised Godin for its proliferation of brand logos on the one guitar, but not here. There's just the engraved headstock logo, that's it.

Our review model is finished in Rustic Burst 'semi gloss', but it's super smooth to the touch and very thin, which allows you to feel the grain lines in the ash top. Overall, it's one of the smartest builds we've ever seen from Godin.

Now, if Godin had simply loaded in a couple of decent humbuckers with some basic switching you'd still have quite a guitar. But there's much more going on here, the centre of which is the well-respected LR Baggs X-Bridge, a two-post vibrato with individual piezo elements mounted within the block saddles. Typically well designed and made, it also features a push-in-and-screw tension-adjustable arm and sits in a lightly recessed rout. Both magnetic pickups mount to the body with a little

1. The LR Baggs' long-running X-Bridge is actually a direct replacement for Fender's American Standard (and presumably the subsequent Professional series). The individual piezo elements sit at the front of each saddle. Bare Knuckle's Boot Camp True Grit is a more contemporary design, joining the company's line-up in 2018

2. Along with the shoulder-placed three-way toggle switch to select the magnetic humbuckers, we get a piezo/both/magnetic mini-toggle selector, volume and tone for the magnetics and a blend control (that Strat-style black knob) for the piezo

UNDER THE HOOD

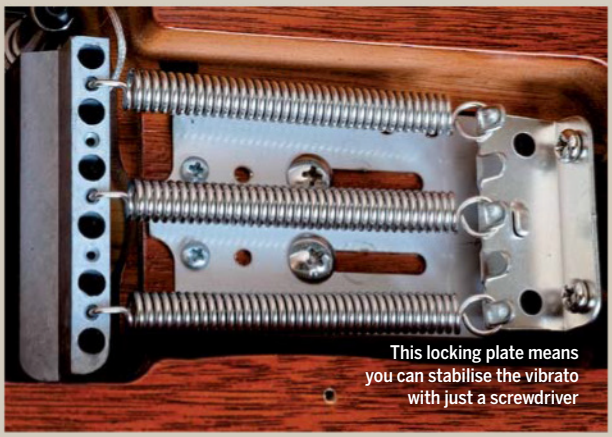
And just what do we find inside?

Removing the rear backplate we find a very tidily machined cavity (unshielded) that houses two small square 500kohm pots with small PCBs that hold the connection points, a .001 microfarads (102) treble bleed capacitor on the volume and a .033 microfarads (333) cap on the tone control. So far so good. The lower control is a dual-ganged pot to which is attached the active LR Baggs Ctrl-X preamp PCB. This allows the tricky onboard mixing of the very different piezo and magnetic pickups. Inside a small bag is the necessary nine-volt block battery; we understand it gives approximating 1,000 hours' playtime. There are a couple of adjustments here, too – piezo pickup output and a phase switch – but we doubt you'll need to mess with those.

Removing the vibrato spring cover plate, which typically isn't recessed, you see the three-spring setup and the tapered die-cast vibrato block. There's also a block of neoprene rubber stuck to the backplate that presumably tames any unwanted spring resonance creeping into the X-Bridge's piezo outputs, or makes the vibrato "behave better", as LR Baggs states.

There's another metal plate under the springs – a 'locking plate' for the vibrato. As supplied, it's not engaged, but by just slackening four screws you can position it so there's no upbend. Currently, there's a major 3rd upbend on the G string and we go down pretty much to slack. So if dive-bombing is your thing, well, you might need to do some work on the nut, not least the D string, which splays out from the nut to the tuner. For more general lighter waggles, though, we had little problem with return to pitch or general tuning stability with basic string stretching and some lube in the wound string slots.

Mini-pots and lots of wire but very tidy work



This locking plate means you can stabilise the vibrato with just a screwdriver

height adjustment: a Bare Knuckle Boot Camp True Grit at the bridge, uncovered with zebra coils, while a covered Seymour Duncan Jazz gets the neck position.

The upper shoulder-placed toggle selects the magnetic pickups as usual, then we get a master volume and tone that sit in recessed divots. Likewise, the X-Bridge's volume/blend control, which is the lower Strat-like black knob (although another amber top hat is provided in the gigbag if you want a more matched appearance). The small three-position mini-toggle switch gives us piezo only (down), magnetic only (up), and both systems together (middle). You can run the magnetic and piezo into two separate amps via the two output jacks, or use the jack closest to the strap button for a mixed mono output into one amp.

Feel & Sounds

First off, the pretty light weight of 3.39kg (7.46lb) is very engaging, as is the neck profile, which is Fender-y in width (42.4mm at the nut, 51.8mm by the 12th) with a subtly V'd back shape that actually feels a little deeper than it measures (21.2mm at the 1st fret, 23.6mm at the 12th). The fingerboard

3

3. Seymour Duncan's SH-2n Jazz humbucker combines a pretty classic PAF-style output (quoted at 7.5kohms) with an Alnico V bar magnet. Seymour came up with the design back in 1974 while famously working in the UK. He's stated that the Jazz paired with the SH-4 JB at bridge remains his favourite pickup set

4. This style of screw-on headstock facing can be seen on other models, such as Godin's Radiator (which also features a large plastic body facing). The nut here is Graph Tech Tusq, while the classy Godin tuners are rear-locking

sides are incurving and the top edges are lightly rolled, and on the 305mm (12-inch) face the medium jumbo wire (2.42 by 1.2mm) is a good choice. It's well set up, too, especially considering that it shipped directly from Canada to *Guitarist* HQ. There's virtually zero relief and an airy action height of 1.5mm on the treble side, 1.7mm on the bass side. You really get the impression that someone has put some time and care into this setup: it plays very well and, unplugged, there's a lively response. The guitar feels very alive.

Starting with the magnetic voices, the Jazz at the neck is a near-perfect choice with its classic output, not over-thick and with a clarity that may well be pared back by the instrument's construction. It cleans up really well with some volume reduction, thinning the sound and becoming a little more single-coil-like, but back on full

Someone has put time and care into this setup: it plays very well and, unplugged, there's a lively response. It feels very alive

4

If you want to run the two pickup systems into one amp (mixed mono) you just use the jack closest to the strap button. You can use both outputs to run the different pickup types into different 'electric' and 'acoustic' amps

throttle it's beautifully vocal and Gibson-esque. The medium-output True Grit again seems slightly pulled back in terms of its high-end response, resulting in quite a mid-forward kick that seems aimed at the hotter side of classic blues and rock, and through a cranked gain-y amp sounds seriously thick yet still pretty articulate. It's a shame there's no coil-split here, but volume reduction is your friend if you want a little more cut and to reduce the heft.

Switching to piezo mode, still from the mixed mono output, that lower piezo blend control doesn't function and the magnetic volume becomes your master, the tone just pulling back some high treble right at the end of its travel. In 'both-on' mode the black knobbed control now acts as a blend for the piezo, while the magnetic volume and tone also act as master controls.

Using the separate outputs to two separate amps things change again. The gold knobs act on the mags and the black becomes a volume for the piezo. There's no master volume now, so if, for example, you get a nice balance between the two sounds but just want to lower your level, then you need to pull back *both* volumes.

Nevertheless, the actual piezo 'acoustic' voice is good. It's not going to fool anyone that you're playing a nicely mic'd Martin, but the acoustic-like brightness and zing can certainly cover acoustic intros and the like in those tricky cover-band sets. And going mixed mono into an AER, aside from adding to the acoustic illusion, you've got your jazz gigs covered where the piezo can add just a little clarity to that neck humbucker.

Verdict

While the modern 'hybrid' electric with acoustic sounds goes back to the early 90s, it remains a hugely valid tool for the right player needing to cover both bases, or the creative musician looking for new hybrid sounds by combining the two. This Radium-X's unshowy, quite classic dress hides some superb sounds along with plenty of choice in how you use them. It's a thoughtful design, and straight out of its gigbag is a really good player that's also light in weight.

Okay, it's not a cheap date or impulse purchase, but so long as Godin can keep its pricing in check, consider the brand back in the game. A welcome return. G

GODIN RADIUM-X

PRICE: £2,699 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Canada
TYPE: Double-cut, solidbody electric
BODY: Chambered mahogany back with carved swamp ash top
NECK: Mahogany, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
NUT/WIDTH: Graph Tech Tusq/42.4mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, pearloid inlays, 305mm (12") radius
FRETS: 22, medium
HARDWARE: LR Baggs X-Bridge (with locking plate), Godin rear-lock tuners – nickel/chrome-plated
STRING SPACING/BRIDGE: 52mm
ELECTRICS: Nickel-covered Seymour Duncan Jazz SH-2 humbucker (neck), zebra-coiled Bare Knuckle Boot Camp True Grit humbucker (bridge), LR-Baggs piezo bridge. 3-way toggle (magnetic pickup selection), 3-way mini-toggle mode switch (magnetic/both/piezo), magnetic volume and tone, piezo volume. Separate magnetic and piezo outputs or mixed mono output
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.39/7.46
RANGE OPTIONS: The standard Radium (£1,299) uses a shorter 629mm (24.8") scale with HSH Godin pickups and a hardtail wrapover bridge. The xtSA (£2,499) is a long-running HSH solidbody also with the LR Baggs X-bridge
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Semi Gloss Rustic Burst (as reviewed), Natural

440 Distribution
0113 2589599
www.godinguitars.com

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Classic, classy chambered-body build; good weight, neck profile, playability, sounds – both magnetic and piezo 'acoustic'

CONS Be good to see a better gigbag at this price; colour choice could be expanded

BOSS KATANA-ARTIST II HEAD
£591

WHAT IS IT? New head version of Boss's flagship Katana-Artist II combo with more pro-oriented features – good-looking, easy to use and relatively affordable

Cut Above

The well-received and affordable Katana range gets a new top-of-the-line head and matching 2x12 cab. There's plenty of tech onboard, but does it satisfy the classic tonehounds?

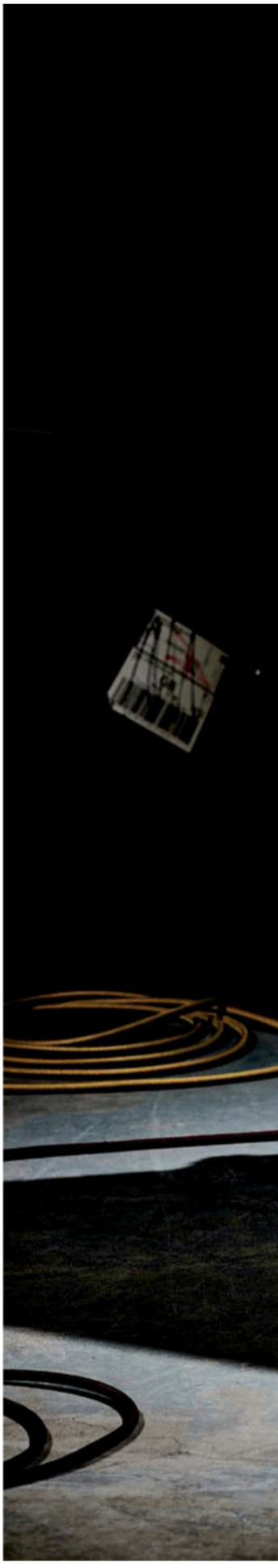
Words Nick Guppy **Photography** Phil Barker

Now in its second evolution, Boss's Katana range is securely established as the go-to digital modelling amp solution for many players at all levels, from beginners to professionals. Topping out the current range is the Katana-Artist II, with expanded features and speaker enclosures loaded with the Waza G12W loudspeaker. The combo version has been available for some time and, now, for those ready to stamp some real authority on their tone, Boss has introduced the Katana-Artist II head, together with a matching 2x12 G12W-loaded speaker cabinet.

This new head features similar visuals to the rest of the range, clad in smart black vinyl accented with silver trim and white control-panel graphics. The particle board case surrounds a robust open-ended steel tray chassis containing the Katana's electronics, with a front-facing control panel that's unique to the Artist amps.

As you might expect, the circuitry has very little in common with a conventional guitar amplifier and looks more like it could have come from one of Roland's synthesizers. The components are mostly miniature SMD, with a large printed circuit board sat vertically behind the control panel and a horizontal main board toward the back of the chassis. A number of proprietary Roland chips occupy the main board, including the ESC2 sound engine, which is common across a number of Roland products. Smaller boards support power supply and input components, while the dominant features are a massive heatsink for the output devices and a substantial mains transformer. There's no universal mains input; our sample Katana-Artist II is for 240 volts and cannot be switched to operate in other countries with different wall mains.

The control panel is logically laid out, with clear white screenprinting on a satin black background for high visibility. There's a single input jack, followed by the amp-type rotary selector, which dials in one of five original Boss amp sounds: Acoustic, Clean, Crunch, Lead and Brown, this last one derived from the critically acclaimed Boss Waza head. A Variation button accesses five alternatives, for a total of 10 amp sounds.



BOSS
BOSS
WAZA SPEAKER

1

1. The head's matching cabinet has two Waza Craft G12W loudspeakers that claim to replicate the punch and dynamics of the late 60s British stack. A removable centre panel on the rear baffle gives the option of semi-closed or fully closed performance

2. The Power Control switch lets you select from 100, 50 or 0.5 watts, with a standby/mute setting, while the Artist II-specific Tone Shape and Contour switches provide instant access to preset EQ curves, edited in the Tone Studio app

2

Reassuringly standard-looking knobs handle gain, volume, bass, mid and treble functions, followed by level controls for the Katana's built-in effects. Two pairs of dual-concentric knobs handle boost, modulation, effects (non-modulation stuff such as wah and octaver) and delay, with a third control knob for the Katana's digital reverb.

There are 30 onboard effects slots, including six for reverb, split into two banks and grouped in three colour-coded slots for ease of recognition. The reverb slots can be combined with delay for more flexibility. Illuminated selector switches light up in different colours to tell you which effect is active, and there's also a tap tempo button. The effects section is followed by controls for Presence, Master volume, Solo volume and Power Control, which switches the Katana's output stage from a maximum 100 watts to 50 and 0.5 watts, with a standby/mute option.

Over the top of these controls are the channel and bank selection buttons; the amp can store four channel patches in each of two banks for a total of eight presets. There's also a handy button called Panel, which puts the Katana into manual 'what you see is what you get' mode.

Moving toward the right-hand corner, you'll find a Cabinet Resonance selector, and a Tone Shape selector that selects one of three EQ shapes, which are configured to taste in the Katana's new improved Tone Studio partner app, with an on/off button for the Katana's Global EQ.

Around the back are three speaker outlets, with jacks for an aux in, effects loop send/return, headphones/recording out and preamp line out/power amp in. Comprehensive footswitch control includes sockets for switching channels and banks plus an expression pedal, or you can attach the GA-FC/GA-FC EX foot controllers. There's also a stereo expansion switch that lets you link two Katana models to enjoy true stereo effects. A MIDI in socket lets you control the Katana-Artist II from a MIDI-compatible effects unit or foot controller, and, last but not least, a USB 'B' socket sends direct audio to your recording device, as well as providing desktop connection to the Tone Studio app, which has also received a makeover.

In fact, the new-look Tone Studio is much improved, with crisp graphics and a reorganised screen that makes workflow quicker and more intuitive. This app is an

3

4

3. The Katana-Artist II's comprehensive rear-panel connections include sockets for MIDI, USB and a variety of footswitches and expression pedals, together with speaker-emulated headphones and line outputs

4. Onboard effects levels are controlled by two dual-concentric knobs, with a third single knob for reverb. There's a tap tempo button, with other effects parameters accessible in the Tone Studio desktop app

essential part of the Katana experience: besides mirroring all the front-panel controls, it's where the effects parameters are edited, along with many other hidden features. For example, alongside the standard bass, mid and treble tone controls there are three more EQs that can be assigned to different places in the signal chain and configured as 10-band graphic or dual-band parametric, with low and high mid swept frequency and variable Q, plus a dedicated Solo EQ. If that sounds like EQ overkill to you, we'd tend to agree. However, you don't have to use them. Other hidden features include a noise suppressor, a choice of signal chains and comprehensive USB, MIDI and footswitch configuration options.

Feel & Sounds

The Katana's original amp voices aren't modelled on any specific classic designs, although from what we know, parent company Roland's Tube Logic research was initially inspired by vintage Tweed-era Fenders. To our ears, there's more than a little Tweed influence in the Artist II's Clean, Crunch and Lead presets, while the Brown voice is lifted from the Boss Waza head and adds extra harmonics for a soaring lead sound with a vocal-like quality that's great fun to play with. New variation options double the number of voices, with more than enough choice to satisfy anyone. Leaving the Katana-Artist II's formidable EQ and effects options aside to begin with and just tweaking the front-panel tone controls in Panel manual mode, there's plenty of range to dial in single coils and humbuckers for spanky cleans, gritty crunch and fat leads that sit well in practically every genre.

> Boss has struck a balance between user-friendliness, sonic potential and affordability

Used as a straightforward guitar amp, the Katana-Artist II sounds authentically 'real', with responsive overdrives and a wide dynamic range that's helped by the 100-watt Class AB output stage and the matching 2x12 enclosure. This is loaded with a pair of Boss's G12W Waza loudspeakers, which replicate vintage 'Greenback' tone with significantly increased power handling. However, these premium drivers are no lightweights – so the single strap handle that's fitted on top isn't ideal for a bulky cabinet weighing almost 30kg.

As you'd expect from Boss, the effects are generally excellent, with many based on famous Boss and Roland hardware. There are over 60 to choose from in the Tone Studio app, with slots for 30 in the amp itself, including six for reverb. New pedal effects include pitch shifter and wah choices, alongside lush choruses, flangers, rotary speaker sims, analogue and digital delays (including an excellent model of the classic 1983 SDE-3000) and five different reverb models, which can also be mixed with delay for extra versatility. Using the effects with one EQ configured as a 10-band graphic, we were able to vary the amp and drive sounds to cover anything from blues to full-on metal, and easily recreate satisfyingly accurate versions of iconic recorded tones.

For live use, the Solo function has its own settings for volume, gain and EQ, making it easy to shift from funky rhythms to blazing leads, while the expansion function links

There are five original amp voices each with a variation, covering traditional clean, crunch and lead functions, together with a specialised voice for acoustic instruments and the 'Brown' lead voice from the award-winning Waza head

two Katana-Artists, producing true stereo effects. Users who want to spend more time playing and less time tweaking will also be pleased to hear there are plenty of ready-made presets available to download from Boss's online Tone Central resource, which can be accessed directly through the Tone Studio app. These presets serve as an impressive demo of the Katana-Artist II's considerable flexibility.

Verdict

Digital modelling has evolved to give guitarists practically any sound they can think of, although not every amp is equal when it comes to performance and some are a lot easier and more fun to work with than others. With the Katana range, Boss has struck an almost perfect balance between user-friendliness, sonic potential and affordability, so it's easy to see why the amps enjoy such universal popularity across the whole spectrum, from beginners and home users to weekend warriors and top-flight professional players.

The Tone Central presets serve as an impressive demo of the Katana-Artist II's flexibility

The 'out of the box' sounds are good enough to go straight on to recorded tracks, with all the programmability you could ask for in the new updated Tone Studio app. Aimed more at professionals, especially in head format, the Katana-Artist II has extra front-panel controls that add to its credentials as a serious performance tool, with plenty of power to handle any stage, large or small. We think it's great value for money as well, although the hefty 2x12 cabinet is an extra commitment and could do with more than a single carry handle. Nevertheless, the II head is definitely one to look at if you want everything the Katana experience can offer.

BOSS KATANA-ARTIST II HEAD

PRICE: £591
ORIGIN: Malaysia
TYPE: Digital modelling preamp and solid-state power amp
OUTPUT: 100W RMS, switchable to 50 and 0.5W
VALVES: None
DIMENSIONS: 296 (h) x 631 (w) x 246mm (d)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 12.4/27
CABINET: MDF
CHANNELS: 8 onboard presets in 2 banks of 4
CONTROLS: Amp Type, Gain, Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, Booster/Mod level, FX/Delay level, Tap tempo, Reverb, Presence, Master Volume, Solo Volume, Contour select, Global EQ select, Power control, Cabinet Resonance, Line Out Air control. Bank A/B select, patch select x4
FOOTSWITCH: Solo footswitch, dual latching footswitch that changes between 2 channels and 2 banks, or GA-FC foot controller for full patch/effects and loop control, or MIDI
ADDITIONAL FEATURES: Switchable output power selection, speaker-emulated headphones/recording and line outputs, aux in, series/parallel effects loop, USB, MIDI In, power amp in, stereo expand select, 'Air Feel' select, 3 speaker outs (1x 8ohm, 2x 16ohm)
OPTIONS: FS-6 dual side-by-side footswitch (£75). For more control, there's the programmable GA-FC foot controller (£106), or the new GA-FC EX controller (£134). If you want to use the built-in wah/whammy effects, the Boss EV-30 dual expression pedal is £106
RANGE OPTIONS: The matching 2x12 extension cabinet with 2 Waza G12W speakers is also £591. The Katana-Artist II is also available as a 1x12 combo (£671)

Roland Europe Group Ltd
www.boss.info/uk

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Powerful pro-oriented performance tool; excellent Waza speakers in matching cab; great sounds; relatively affordable

CONS No MIDI out/thru; no balanced line out; cab is a two-person lift; Tone Studio app currently only available for Windows and macOS desktops (excepting Katana Air) – we'd like to see the mobile device version extended to cover other Katana amps

Fender

American Vintage II

INTRODUCING THE NEW 1951 TELECASTER® IN BUTTERSCOTCH BLONDE

BUILT TO ORIGINAL SPECS. ALL OF THEM.
INCLUDING A 1951 "U"-SHAPED MAPLE NECK, RESONANT ASH BODY AND PURE VINTAGE '51 TELECASTER® PICKUPS.

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FLATTLEY THE ACE
£221

WHAT IS IT? A boost pedal with adjustable tone from the UK pedal maker

Safe Bet

When it comes to dealing out boost and EQ, the only card you might need is Flattley's The Ace

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. This pedal's finish makes it one of Flattley's Silver range, rather than the more ornate Platinum series, but it still has cool graphics – which any Motörhead fan would surely enjoy

2. Delivering essentially flat EQ in its central position, the Tone knob offers a bass boost to the left and a treble boost to the right

3. The halo light ring surrounding the footswitch is designed to diffuse the light when playing live, therefore avoiding the off-putting brightness you may get from standard LEDs

The latest from Flattley Guitar Pedals, the Gloucestershire-based effects company, is The Ace, a clean boost/buffer with the advantage of having a Tone knob to target the boost. It features a blue halo light ring showing its engaged status and a topper on the footswitch, giving you a bit more to aim for when switching.

The Ace's tone stack is the same as that in Flattley's Solaris Pro fuzz and boost pedal and is designed to deliver an effectively flat sound when the knob is central, with a bass boost to the left and a treble boost to the right. The most neutral position of the Tone knob isn't totally flat, but kicking in the pedal yields a subtle change in the midrange that seems to thicken your basic sound.

The Volume knob runs from zero so you can leave it right down and use the pedal as a kill switch if you so desire. Its unity gain point depends on the position of the Tone knob, but it's around the 11 o'clock mark with a fairly neutral tone, leaving plenty of further knob travel to set the amount of boost that you need.

You can add a touch of treble to the boost for extra sparkle, but, equally, if you want to bolster the sound with more body you can turn it the other way. Going further, fully clockwise on the Tone knob delivers an obvious treble boost that stays musical as it's bright but not nasal or harsh, while retaining plenty of other frequencies so you don't feel like your whole low-end has disappeared. You can set the Volume knob accordingly if you just want a tonal change without any increase in volume.

The flexibility here comes from the several ways in which you can use this pedal. The front of your signal chain may be the most obvious, and it's great for pushing a favourite drive or distortion pedal, but it can work equally well elsewhere inside the pedal chain or at the end directly before your amp.

Verdict

Flattley's The Ace is good-sounding boost pedal with plenty of whomp delivered with sensible tonal options. It's ideal for giving you that extra push and emphasis for solos but is equally adept as an always-on component, adding a buffer and boosting signal strength with enhancement for your core tone.

FLATTLEY THE ACE

PRICE: £221
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Tone boost pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Volume, Tone, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS: 70 (w) x 120 (d) x 53mm (h)

Flattley Guitar Pedals
07802 455 127
www.flattleyguitarpedals.com

8/10

PROS Good level of boost available; sensible tonal options; buffer; halo light ring; footswitch topper; can be used as a kill switch

CONS We'd have preferred a more compact version

THE RIVALS

The Source Audio ZIO Analog Front End + Boost (£299), which features a choice of four distinct preamp circuits, is a pedal that can be used in much the same way. New from Origin Effects is the M-EQ Driver Mid Booster & Drive Pedal (£259), featuring the mid-focused tones of a vintage Pultec studio EQ optimised for guitar. Also new is the Maestro Titan Boost (£149), set for review in our next issue. It offers up to 25dB of boost that can be tweaked, with a Tone knob adjusting the high-end and a high-pass filter to roll off the low-end.

Source Audio's ZIO boost offers up a choice of preamp flavours

MXR M249 SUPER BADASS DYNAMIC OD
£149

WHAT IS IT? A MOSFET-driven overdrive pedal from MXR's Super Badass series

Engines Ready

With the latest in MXR's Super Badass series, you're set for a dynamic and flexible drive

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

1. This switch offers two voicings: the Cut position has a flat EQ and transparent sound, while Boost is louder with a more prominent presence
2. There are no bad sounds with the Tone knob. It's there to focus the top-end of the sound where you need it – bright and biting or mellowed out
3. MXR has been using the same size and style of enclosure since it started in 1974, but this one gets a racing stripe!

This pedal is the fifth from MXR with 'Badass' in its name, and the third of the compay's 'Super Badass' pedals, completing a trilogy of dirt alongside the Super Badass Distortion and Super Badass Variac Fuzz. Based around MOSFET clipping diodes, it's a basic three-knob pedal with Output Volume, Gain and Tone knobs plus a two-way toggle switch that gives you Cut or Boost.

The Dynamic OD pedal sounds tonally most neutral and transparent in the Cut position with the Tone knob set close to midway. With the Gain knob set at minimum, you'll get unity gain and clean sound around 11 o'clock, leaving plenty of knob travel for dialling in some clean boost that you can liven up by turning the tone knob clockwise from the neutral point, adding some crisp note definition. If you really want more emphatic tonal sharpening, then setting the toggle switch to Boost actually adds some gain and pushes the upper mids forward for plenty of extra bite.

Lots of boost options, then, with adjustable tonal flavour that will push an amp nicely into drive or add an extra layer to another drive pedal. But getting the Gain knob involved opens up loads more possibilities because there's a wide range of drive available, from the light crunch of an amp just starting to break up, to well beyond that. The pedal actually responds very much like a driven valve amp and lives up to its name as a Dynamic OD. There's a superb response to playing dynamics and the pedal offers really great clean-up with some guitar volume roll-back; you can (and may wish to) keep this pedal on all the time, controlling things with your volume knob.

At the top end of the Gain knob's range, there's quite a full-on sound, especially in Boost mode, with lots of harmonics and a touch of fuzz on the bottom-end. It can be as aggressive as you'd like it to be (it is a Badass, after all!), but the Tone knob works brilliantly in dialling back any unwanted fizz and adjusting the overall output EQ to sit with the rest of your chain.

Verdict

MXR's Super Badass Dynamic OD is an excellent compact overdrive pedal with great dynamic sensitivity and a flexibility that will see it playing a crucial role in front of both clean or driven amps.

MXR M249 SUPER BADASS DYNAMIC OD

PRICE: £149
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Drive pedal
FEATURES: True bypass
CONTROLS: Output, Tone, Gain, Boost/Cut switch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard input, standard output
POWER: 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) 6mA
DIMENSIONS: 64 (w) x 110 (d) x 50mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE

9/10

PROS Compact size; two modes; great dynamic response and clean-up; wide range of gain

CONS Nothing worth mentioning

THE RIVALS

Fulltone's California factory is no longer in operation so its OCD and Full-Drive2 have been discontinued, but the Joyo Maximum Mosfet Overdrive Guitar Effect Pedal (£54) bears more than a passing resemblance to a Full-Drive2 and may be something worth seeking out, especially if you are on a tight budget. Also relatively affordable is the Electro-Harmonix OD Glove MOSFET Overdrive/Distortion (£75) with Volume, Gain and Tone knobs plus a Tone Shift switch. If you have more money to spend and aren't averse to importing gear from the USA, the Blackstone Appliances Mosfet Overdrive ($245) features two channels, each with its own drive and level settings.

If you're after Brit-inspired amp sounds, this could be a good fit

theWishlist

Dream gear to beg, borrow and steal for...

Cream T Aurora Custom Hot Rod £2,999

CONTACT **www.creamtpickupsdirect.com** WEB **Cream T Guitars** WORDS **Dave Burrluck** PHOTOGRAPHY **Olly Curtis**

Barely two years ago, the idea of a Cream T guitar was pushed into motion. Towards the end of 2021 we saw the Aurora, a clever design between Cream T's Thomas Nilsen and Billy F Gibbons, realised by UKGB's Leigh Dovey. Now well into production stride, Cream T is beginning to offer a custom service. Brand owner Tim Lobley explains: "We actually already do quite a bit of custom work at UKGB, but we're going to start doing more. We have our standard production runs, but we can easily drop in custom orders, whether that's for Cream T or other brands made by UKGB, such as PJD and Seth Baccus. It offers the customer more variety without the long wait of many custom guitars."

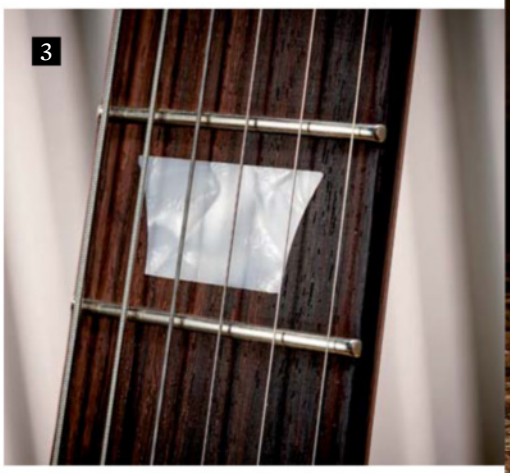
Our featured custom-finished Aurora Custom was conceived by Tim. "UKGB had picked out a piece of wood for a standard Aurora Custom, but when I went to see it I didn't think, cosmetically, it was good enough to put a flame-maple top on. I suggested we do a solid colour – but not a gold top as we'd already done those. Then I remembered the first time I saw ZZ Top on the UK TV programme *The Tube* in 1983, promoting *Eliminator*. The bass player in the band I played in at the time was quite into ZZ Top. While I wasn't into the music as much, I thought Billy Gibbons' tone was unreal.

"The Explorer-style guitars Billy and Dusty used were red on top, blue on the back and sides with gold hardware," Tim continues. "The next week, the bass player and I went out and bought a pair of Explorer-style guitars – we could only find blue Aria Pro IIs, but we still thought they looked cool [laughs].

"It's kind of ironic that all these years later – having been inspired by that huge guitar sound – I ended up working with Billy, albeit through a third party, and he ends up co-designing the Aurora guitar. I just thought it would be cool to have one in the original colouring that I vividly remember. I agree it's a pretty Marmite colour scheme, but I still love it."

With shades on, we can report that the Aurora remains a very fine slice of Brit craft that's light in weight at 3.2kg (7.04lb) and has a beautifully shaped neck that's lightly natural-finished. It comes with the Relish-licensed pickup swapping and six pickups that you can swap in seconds: a set of Duchess humbucker-sized P-90s, an Original Banger bridge single coil, a Banger & Mash neck humbucker (originally designed for Keith Richards) and, of course, a set of Whiskerbuckers created from a scan of Billy's 'Pearly Gates'. Beards are optional.

1. One of Billy F Gibbons' ideas was this classic Martin-style headstock. It was all a part of designing a guitar that offered a new take on an established style
2. Under the opaque Hot Rod finish is a one-piece, lightly chambered mahogany back with a thin maple cap. The swappable pickups are held in place with small magnets: simply pull one (or both) out of the cavity and push in a different one
3. One of the many things that have impressed us with these UKGB builds is the fretwork, which is first-class. The pearloid inlays clearly reference one of the influences and the guitar uses a 629mm (24.75-inch) scale length



4. With its '59 LP-style profile and 305mm (12-inch) fingerboard radius, the neck has a classic feel. The nut width is 43.6mm; 52.6mm by the 12th fret. It's a pretty typical 'C' in profile: 22mm deep at the 1st fret; 24.5mm by the 12th

5. From the front of the guitar no-one would know it featured pickup swapping. The pickup rings are a little different, too, designed and made in the UK by Anomaly. Aside from this six-pickup package, the Aurora comes with two swappable humbuckers at £2,799 or with fixed pickups at £2,499 – all include a cream coloured Hiscox case

6. Although the Aurora BFGT twin-pickup guitar comes without a pickup toggle switch (as per Billy's requirements), we get one here. Along with a master tone control, each pickup volume control has a pull-switch to voice a coil-split (which obviously doesn't work if it's a single-coil pickup)

***Guitarist* would like to thank Andertons for the loan of this one-off custom Aurora**
www.andertons.co.uk

THE LINEUP

Gas Supply

Our pick of the month's most delectable and wallet-bothering new gear

PRS 2023 releases From £899

CONTACT: **PRS Guitars Europe** PHONE: **01223 874301** WEB: **www.prsguitars.com**

A DECADE TO REMEMBER

S2 Anniversary models

As the PRS S2 range celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, the company has issued 1,000 Custom 24 and McCarty 594 anniversary models (both £2,499) to celebrate. Cuban mahogany necks, mother-o-pearl bird inlays and USA humbuckers are all included.

New guitars across all of its catalogue? It seems as if PRS has been busy...

Indeed. The NAMM Show might not be for a couple of months yet, but PRS isn't waiting. Hot on the heels of the DGT SE (reviewed in full this issue) comes a clutch of new releases across the brand's entire product range. There are Core and S2 models, SE signatures and more.

Okay, what have we got?

We're going to start at the top with the new iteration of the Modern Eagle V. PRS previously made this available as a £9k Private Stock model in an extremely limited 120-piece run. Now, it's finally cemented itself in the production catalogue from £4,599. It's a triple-pickup attack with a pair of TCI humbuckers in the neck and bridge positions, but nestled in the middle sits an NS-01 single coil. To go with that, we get some comprehensive switching. The two mini-toggles split the humbuckers for "true single coil" tones, and there's a pull switch on the volume control to give us both 'buckers, or all three pickups together, plus a five-way blade. Elsewhere, it features PRS Hybrid Hardware and a Gen III Patented Tremolo, and comes in a whopping 17 finishes including the Cobalt Smokeburst that's shown bottom left.

What's that McCarty?

That, or rather *those*, are the first ever McCarty models to feature in the SE line-up. PRS has made the McCarty 594 available in double- and single-cut flavours (both £1,049), and both are built around a similar template.

MODERN EAGLE V
If you couldn't stretch to the £9k-ish Private Stock version, the Modern Eagle V is now available as a more affordable production guitar

SE MCCARTY 594
PRS has gone big on the McCarty, with the first ever addition to the SE line-up offered in both double-cut and single-cut shapes. There's even an SE Standard model!

SE HOLLOWBODY STANDARD PIEZO
The SE Standard Hollowbody has gained a piezo model, placing hybrid magnetic/under-saddle blends under more fingers than ever

Periphery's Mark Holcomb (SE SVN pictured), Shinedown's Zach Myers and Between The Buried And Me's Dusty Waring have all made revisions to their signature models

That's a mahogany body, maple top and flame maple veneer with a 'shallow violin' carve, met with a mahogany Pattern Vintage neck. Both guitars feature a 24.594-inch (624.7mm) scale length – in line with vintage Gibson scales – and the two-piece bridge/tailpiece design "consist[s] of the same design and materials found on PRS USA and Private Stock models".

The SE Hollowbody Standard Piezo is a hidden gem that could be very popular this year

Electronically, they're home to a pair of PRS-designed 58/15 LT 'S' covered humbuckers, four-control layout, with push-pull tone switches offering partial coil-splits. Both versions are offered in Black Gold Burst, Faded Blue and Vintage Sunburst. But if that isn't enough, PRS has also issued SE McCarty 594 Singlecut Standard (£899)!

That's the most affordable series, isn't it?

Correct – and joining the SE McCarty 594 Standard is the SE Hollowbody Standard Piezo (£1,399), which offers plenty of sonic options for the money. Alongside the two 58/15 LT 'S' humbuckers is a PRS piezo-equipped stoptail, making this a workhorse offering into the pseudo/hybrid acoustic-style tone arena. There are volume controls for the magnetic pickups and piezo respectively, along with a master tone control and three-way switch. It's something of a hidden gem that we think could be very popular this year.

You also mentioned some new signature models, too?

Yes, there's plenty of artist action going on here, mainly in the SE line-up. Shinedown guitarist Zach Myers has adopted the 594 scale-length and a 'shallow violin' carve for his semi-hollow signature (£979), which is now available exclusively in Myers Blue.

Periphery's Marc Holcomb's new SE signature gets a low-tuning-friendly 648mm (25.5-inch) scale (£1,065), and is fitted with Mark's signature Seymour Duncan Scarlet & Scourge pickups. If you fancy going even lower, it's also offered in the 673mm (26.5-inch) scale SVN seven-string version (£1,199, pictured above). Both come in the fantastic Holcomb Blue Burst. **[SW]**

ALSO OUT NOW...

IBANEZ PENTATONE PREAMP £179

Ibanez's new Pentatone Preamp distortion pedal steps away from the tradition of its famous green overdrive to offer a detailed distortion that tonehounds will surely relish. As well as the Pre Boost gain section, there's a Post Boost to keep your signal level up, plus a Bright circuit for introducing more high-end. But where it really allows for some tonal tweakery is with the two-band EQ along with a five-band parametric EQ, which has rotary controls for frequency selection and sliders for level control. Throw in the noise gate and this could be a gain-supplying bargain.

www.ibanez.com

WOLFMEISTER MINI-PEDALBOARD $120

After searching for a solution to house a small number of pedals, Wolfmeister's Wolfgang Ritter came up with the Wolfmeister Mini-Pedalboard, and now you can buy one, too. Each Mini-Pedalboard (US$120) is made from laser-cut, powder-coated aluminium with handmade wooden side-handles, all assembled in Perth, Australia. The boards measure 220mm by 315mm, making them just slightly bigger than a sheet of A4 paper. And with a height of 45mm, housing your power supply underneath is easy. They come in four waxed finishes, and Wolfmeister also sells a case (US$299, available in leather or vegan leather), which will house the 'board with no need to remove it while in use.

www.thewolfmeister.com

THE LINEUP

Fretbuzz

A monthly look at must-hear artists from all corners of the guitar world, from the roots of their sound to the tracks that matter most

Artist: Samba Touré

Album: Binga (Glitterbeat Records)

Binga is named after and pays homage to the area of Mali where Samba Touré grew up – and it celebrates his Songhoy roots **https://samba-toure.bandcamp.com**

Leading Malian singer and guitarist Samba Touré is an adept player, crafting licks to support his sharp blues songs, but he arrived at the guitar later and without any formal background. "I began music as a singer in a band in [Malian capital] Bamako," Samba tells us. "But when I started as a solo artist, I quickly learned the guitar. I would say it was in quite an intuitive way," he continues. "I don't know anything about music theory; everything happens between my head and hands, by feeling."

Speaking To Tradition

It is only fairly recently that Malian music – a traditionally oral form that served as education and information, as well as entertainment – incorporated the Western guitar. "My style is Songhoy guitar," Samba explains. "A long time ago there was no guitar in our musical tradition – the stringed instruments were ngonis [small goat-skin-headed instruments, related to the banjo, with wooden or gourd bodies], but little by little, the guitar took an important place. The way of playing the Songhoy guitar is directly inspired by the playing of the ngoni, we just transposed it to the guitar. Often, with my ngoni player, we go into duels, where each one challenges the other. It's a moment in our concerts that I appreciate a lot. It's very communicative with the public and, of course, it gives a lot of room for improvisation, for surprise."

You'll see Samba with both acoustic and electric instruments, as he leans towards whatever best serves the song

Stripping Back

For *Binga*, Samba decided it was time to strip back his arrangements, the result likely being his most direct album. "After albums with a more blues-rock orientation, Philippe [Sanmiguel], my manager and producer, decided to leave me in the studio and only intervene in the mixing and editing," Samba says. "He wanted me to make music that was as natural to me as possible. There was a real intention to go back to something simpler, more natural and therefore more traditional, too. When there is less artifice, less effects, the listener's ear grasps more immediately the melodies and the subtleties of interaction between the three main instruments we used, which were guitar, ngoni and calabash for percussion. It also leaves more room for silence."

The Right Tools

When it comes to his instruments, Samba uses acoustic or electric depending on the situation. "For me, the guitar is a tool that would also be a faithful friend," he explains. "I've had several since I started that I've been given, have exchanged, bought or received as gifts and I think I've loved them all. I don't have a preference [for acoustic or electric]. It depends on the style of song; some lend themselves better to acoustic, some to electric. For *Binga*, I played everything acoustic for a more traditional and intimate result. And I had initially planned to tour with acoustics, but most of the concerts were outdoors at festivals and electric is better suited to that."

His Master's Voice

Samba prizes one instrument over the others: a special electric from a very special musician. "I do have an emotional attachment with one more than the others," he admits. "It's an old, very worn and tired red Fender from the early 70s that was offered to me when I started by my master, Ali Farka Touré. Each time I go on tour, I want to take it to Europe to have it served by a specialist, but you know airlines, we are always limited with luggage. Sooner or later I will give it back life and take it on tour." **[GK]**

Standout track: *Sambalama*
For fans of: Ali Farka Touré, Tinariwen, Bombino, Muddy Waters

"There was a real intention to go back to something simpler, more natural and therefore more traditional"

STARTING BLOCK

Samba found his way to the guitar via modest measures

Samba's first instrument was a primitive but not so unusual thing made from a sardine box, a tree branch and a fishing line. "It goes back a long way and in the end it's not that original," he says. "Many children in Mali and elsewhere in Africa or the world have made their first instruments with recycled materials. I didn't have mine very long. Later, I became a singer in a band and it's only after that split that I finally started playing the guitar... A real one this time!"

Tones Behind The Tracks

We talk to **Jared James Nichols** about how a guitar that fell to earth in a tornado helped him defy blues-rock cliché on his stellar new album

Artist: Jared James Nichols

Album: Jared James Nichols (Black Hill Records)

Jared James Nichols' new self-titled record is his third studio release

Jared's new self-titled album was recorded in Nashville at Blackbird studios with a three-piece band, tracking live in the studio, straight to tape. "No computers were harmed in the making of this record," he quips. "It was my longtime drummer Dennis Holm and my old friend Clark Singleton on the bass guitar, and it was produced by a young Englishman named Eddie Spear." The end result is a furious journey into the realms of modern-day heavy blues-rock.

What were your go-to guitars for the album?

"My red Les Paul was the primary guitar, then I had a 1956 Les Paul Junior, a fantastic guitar – these old P-90 guitars have their own sound. I had one of my Epiphone 'Old Glory' [Les Paul Customs, Jared's signature] and on some of the later tracking I used 'Dorothy', a '52 Les Paul that I got from a guy outside of Chicago – there was a tornado and he found it in his yard! I said I'd love to get it running and he gave it to me – so I gave him one of my Epiphone signatures.

"So it was all for a choice of tone because all of the old guitars have weak magnets, so they sounded amazing. But there were a few things that needed to have punch – a little bit more grind – so I used the Epiphone. So only those four guitars, all P-90 guitars, and that was it. I kept it simple."

"The whole time I was fighting the amps, fighting the guitar – in a really awesome way – in order to manipulate them to get certain tones"

Jared with his P-90 loaded signature Epiphone 'Gold Glory' Les Paul Custom, which followed his first 'Old Glory' black-finished model

PHOTO BY DAVID MCCLISTER

Some players use the amp for their drive tones, for others pedals are involved. How does that work in your world?

"For this record, specifically, I used really big amps, which I don't get to do on stage a lot because they're so crazy. So I had one of the Blackstar Artisan 100-watts, which is like the big boy, and I paired that with a [Marshall] 1968 Super Lead 100-watt. I had both of those amps running at the same time – *cranked*. We set up as if we were playing a live show and I cranked them to the point where the [guitar's] volume knob was so expressive that when I was all the way up, it cut your head off. And then when I rolled it down I could get a really nice, clean violin-like sustain.

"I ran the amps super mid-heavy, mid-focused, and it was awesome to have the interaction between the Blackstar and the old Marshall because there was a lot of clarity from the Blackstar, and the Marshall added weight to it. So I primarily try to get as much out of the amp as I can. Then I was boosting that. And now you're gonna think I'm a total cork-sniffer... I had a Klon on halfway up, hitting both amps, and then if I needed anything else I just put a Tube Screamer on."

That must have sounded magnificent.

"Oh, it was. It was glorious to play guitar like that because less was so much more, especially in my playing all over the record. The weight of the notes... It's just such a different mindset. And you have to be so physical with it. You have to command it: if you don't it'll go the other way. The whole time I was fighting the amps, fighting the guitar – in a really awesome way – in order to manipulate them to get certain tones."

The fuzz on *Easy Come, Easy Go* sounds amazing. Which pedal did you use?

"It's a Chicago Iron Octavian. That is probably my favourite pedal ever. I used to have one when I was a kid and I plugged it in and I went, 'This sounds horrible,' so I got rid of it and I ended up buying another one.

PHOTO BY JIM DONNELLY

Simple volume and a boost, and it is the gnarliest fuzz octave and, again, another pedal that you have to manipulate to get it to sound right. Total nasty guitar pedal but in the coolest way possible."

What about the wah sounds on *Hard Wired* and the phaser tones on *Shadow Dancer*?

"My favourite wah-wah that I've found is an RMC. The one that I'm using on the new record is the Wheels Of Fire Wah and it just does something, it has all of the response. I haven't modded it or anything, but when I hit it, it feels like a true wah in the way that it quacks. I play with my fingers, so the way that it quacks and the way that it works with the way I play, it just feels so good. I use a Uni-Vibe pedal, which is called a [Sabbadius] Funky-Vibe. I use that a lot, like on the beginning of *Hard Wired*. But the secret weapon on the record is we also had a Leslie cabinet. So when you hear that sound on *Shadow Dancer*, that is that Leslie speaker getting hit by the amps. It's glorious, man."

You mentioned you play with your fingers, as opposed to a pick. How do you get such good articulation that way?

"Well, I'm a lefty. So when I started to play, I originally wanted to be a lefty, but the first guitar lesson I had, the guy said, 'You gotta use the pick.' The pick never felt right in my hands and I tried for a few years and I got okay at it, but it just never felt comfortable. So what I used to do was hide the pick and use my fingers. And then it turned into a thing where I'd put the pick on the amp and use my fingers.

"What I love about using the fingers is it's so much more personal for me. I can feel every note that I'm playing, I can feel the strings. No-one taught me how to play fingerstyle, I just spent thousands of hours working through things. Basically, the way that I play with my fingers is just a style that I developed through repetition and through what feels good. I don't use my nails, I use the flesh, so it was just through trial and error, and through a lot of blisters and cracked bones."

A few tracks on the album – notably *Saint Or Fool* – are at this interesting crossroads between metal, hard rock and blues. Do you think genres are meaningful any more? Or do we all just throw it all together and call it what we will?

"That song is weird. *Saint Or Fool* started as a ballad and I brought it in to the producer, and he goes, 'Dude, this sounds like every other ballad in the world. The world doesn't need another ballad. Make it evil!' He's like, 'Give me a heavy riff.' And he plays great piano, so he sits down and he goes [sings riff] and he says, 'Do that on your guitar.' So I went, '*Ding, ding, ding*.' And he was like, 'That's it!' It's the simplest riff ever. It's literally just stacked powerchords, but when we played it, it felt cool. It felt awesome. One of my biggest influences is the band Mountain. So it felt like that.

"Going on with the genre thing, man, I don't think anything really means anything any more. For me, it all comes from the same place, which is, loosely, the blues. And I filter that through all my guitar heroes of the late 60s and 70s and all the great bands – Free, Bad Company – all the stuff of the 70s. Then I filter that through those guys that came through in the 80s. And then the grunge stuff. And with this record, specifically, I went in with that mindset. I said, 'Let the songs go where they go. Because I don't want to make just another blues guitar guy album.' I want to grow, you know what I mean?" **[JD/DM]**

Jared James Nichol is released by Black Hill Records via https://blackhillrecords.com Jared plays London's The Blackheart on 22 February **www.jaredjamesnichols.com**

The body of Jared's '52 Les Paul 'Dorothy' – allegedly one of the first 25 ever made – was found in a backyard after a tornado and fully restored by Joel Wilkens at JW Restoration, using grain-matched mahogany and a fingerboard made from 400-year-old Brazilian rosewood. Some of the authentic-spec parts were donated by fellow Les Paul enthusiast Joe Bonamassa

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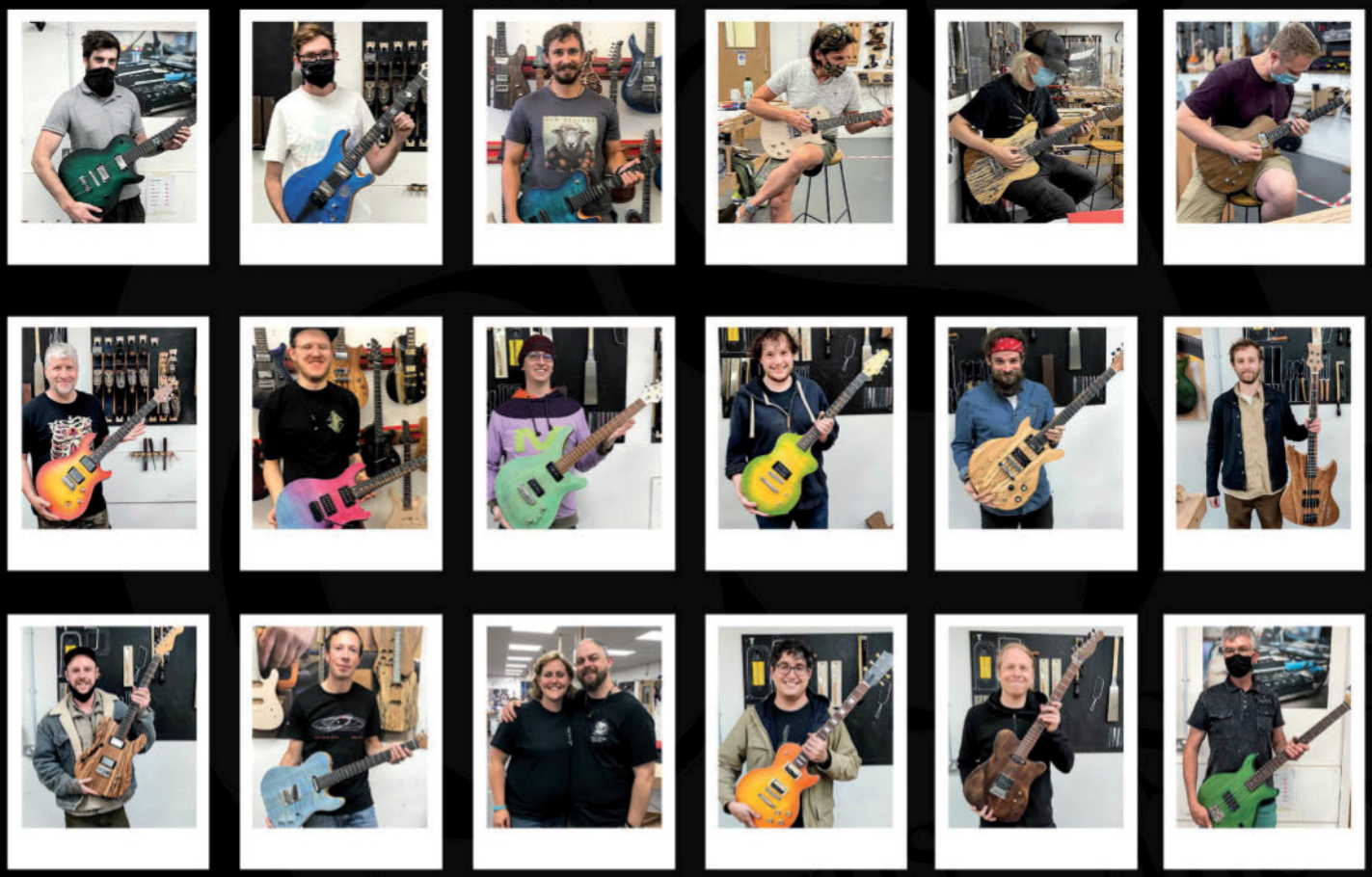

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NEVILLE'S ADVOCATE

Beck-Ola!

Neville Marten recalls the impact that Jeff Beck had on guitarists of his generation, plus a story or two about his involvement with *Guitarist*

One of the few good things about being my age – and I'd guess that of a good many *Guitarist* readers – is that we got to hear some of the best music ever made as it came out. Thus I heard *She Loves You* when I was 13, *Purple Haze* when I was 17, and so on. But in 1965, already aware of The Yardbirds due to the recent hit *For Your Love*, when their new song came on the radio it floored me; I'd never heard a sound like it. It was Beck, on his Telecaster, plugged into a fuzz box playing the intro to *Heart Full Of Soul*. Soon came the fabulous slide solo on *Evil Hearted You*, then *Over Under Sideways Down* with licks that slithered around the neck like a snake on speed, and the incredible *Shapes Of Things*, with a solo that had everything *and* the kitchen sink. Like every other budding guitarist, I was staggered. We'd gone from Bert Weedon (and nothing against dear Bert) to this in a few brief years. From that moment, Jeff never stopped innovating and never, ever sounded like another guitarist.

"This incredible roar assailed our ears. It was Jeff turning up in his vintage hot-rod Ford in Surf Green. On the back seat was his matching Strat"

My first of several *Guitarist* interviews with Jeff was back in the 80s. I was on holiday in Cornwall and was contacted to say it was on. I hauled my disgruntled girlfriend back home to Essex so I could go from there down to London for the interview. The PR was adamant: "Don't mention *Hi Ho Silver Lining*!" Having heard that Jeff had a bit of a reputation I was more than a little nervous. But he couldn't have been lovelier. He was chatty and friendly and – because I could relate to his own memories being from at least a similar era – treated me like an equal.

And no, I couldn't resist so I asked him about *Hi Ho...* and especially its solo, which again was a monster for its time. He told me about the overspill from another take that created a faux harmony – and which both Brian May and Andy Powell have stated was perhaps the inspiration for what they would go on to do.

Little Deuce Coupe

I sometimes wonder whether this incident really happened. But Geoff Whitehorn tells a similar Jeff story about a car and a guitar, so I think it did. Fender had an artist relations room at a rehearsal complex in London called Nomis, and I was asked to set up all the guitars so that visiting luminaries could play them. One day they hosted an event, to which I was invited and which Jeff was also due to attend. Come his allotted arrival time this incredible roar assailed our ears. It was Jeff turning up in his vintage hot-rod Ford in Surf Green. On the back seat was sitting – not in its case – his signature Strat in matching Surf Green. He had a massive grin on his face and simply wanted to give everyone a 'Jeff moment' to cherish. That same day I showed him my big leather-bound autograph book that I got all my interviewees to sign then donate a plectrum that I'd stick next to their scrawl. Jeff was instant in his response: he put his thumb in his mouth, stuck his thumbprint on the page and wrote some rather rude words to the effect that picks were for wimps!

My final Jeff story involves a music show that *Guitarist* staged at Wembley Conference Centre, and where Jennifer Batten was playing a clinic. I'll let David Mead explain, as he was at the heart of the action: "Jennifer's manager had contacted me and asked if we could help get Jeff backstage as a surprise, as she was a huge fan. We managed to wangle it and, come the day, sneaked him in to watch Jennifer's clinic. My job was to then waylay her so we could get Jeff to the backstage area without her seeing. Luckily, it was Jennifer's birthday so I got the crowd to sing *Happy Birthday*, which gave us time to relocate him. I accompanied Jennifer back to her dressing room and when we opened the door, Jeff was sitting there with a huge grin and a raised glass of Champagne."

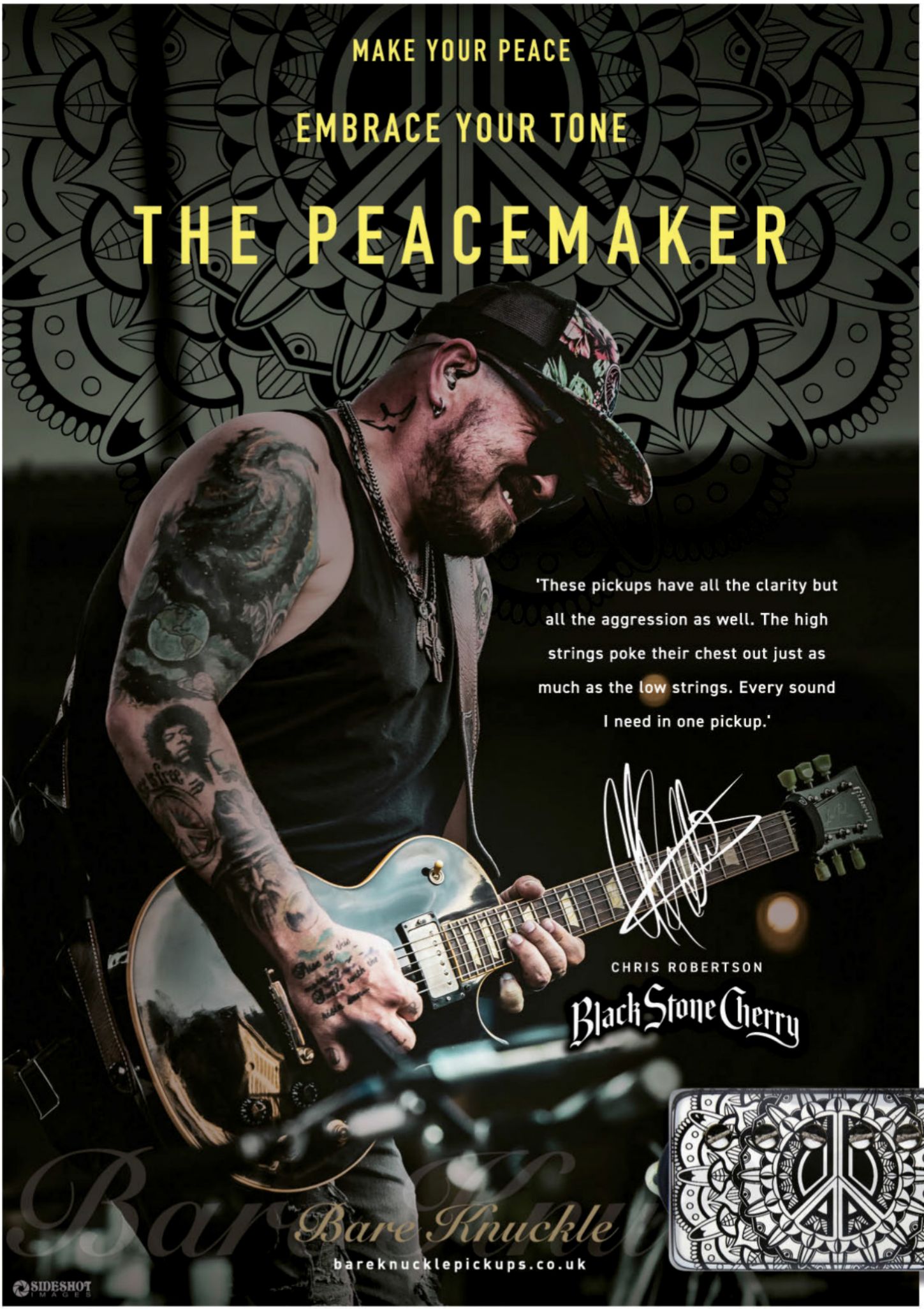
There'll never be another guitarist like him. We all know that. But it seems he was universally hailed as a lovely bloke, too. He certainly always was to me. Gone, but never to be forgotten.

GAS OF THE MONTH

Surf's Up!

What? Fender Jeff Beck Stratocaster, Surf Green
Where seen? www.richtonemusic.co.uk **Price?** £2,439

It had to be this, didn't it? At the time of writing, they are to-order but in stock at Fender, so the wait is only seven to 10 days. When Jeff's first signature Strat came out in 1991 the neck was a gigantic U-shape and off-putting to many. These days it's a manageable 'soft C', but the guitar also comes with several key appointments stipulated by Jeff. These include: dressed-away heel for improved access, LSR roller nut and locking saddles to cope with his whammy bar use, and Hot Noiseless single-coil pickups. The rest is standard modern Strat fare with gloss urethane finish alder body, rosewood 'board satin urethane coated maple neck, two-point floating vibrato with stainless steel saddles, and 22 medium jumbo frets. It also comes strung with .009 to .042-gauge strings and features Jeff's signature on the headstock. A legendary guitar for a legendary player.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SIDESHOT IMAGES

CONFESSIONS OF A LUTHIER

Draw A Blank

This issue **Alex Bishop** tackles the fiddly job of crafting a new guitar nut from scratch

When I consider my recent guitar repair jobs, the common thread over these past few days has been the troublesome topic of guitar nuts. This humble strip of bone or plastic is actually one of the most crucial links in the chain when it comes to high-performance guitars, but, fortunately for the home luthier, replacing one can be an easy upgrade to perform.

The reason for replacing a nut can be as simple as replacing a low-quality plastic nut with a hard-wearing bone one, but life on the road means nuts are also easily damaged and chipped. Buzzing open strings are the symptoms of a nut with slots that are cut too deep, or grooves that have become worn through decades of tuning and retuning. Sometimes the discomfort caused by the pointed corners of a crudely shaped nut are enough to justify removal.

"A good-quality set of nut files – likely a once-in-a-career purchase – will prove indispensable if tinkering on guitars develops into a habit"

A string spacing rule will keep nut slots perfectly consistent

Removing a nut is relatively easy procedure, but care must be taken to avoid damaging lacquer. On some guitars the finishing process is often carried out with the nut in situ, so I always prefer to score around the outside of the nut first with a scalpel blade. With a block of wood positioned against the front edge I strike the nut with a hammer to dislodge it. (Fender nuts are an exception: I find these are best removed sideways to avoid causing wanton destruction.)

Once the problematic nut has been extracted, there is the opportunity to purchase pre-shaped nuts that are carefully sized. If one can be certain that a like-for-like replacement is available, this is the easiest option. However, I personally always opt to make a new nut from a blank. That way, I can be certain that the dimensions of the new nut will fit the instrument perfectly and will be finished to perfection. Take it from me: a nut that is anything other than completely flush with the sides of the neck is pretty irksome for a discerning guitarist.

ESSENTIAL TOOL CHECKLIST

- Sandpaper (120 & 320 grit)
- Half pencil
- String spacing rule
- Set of double-edged nut files
- Micromesh polishing pads

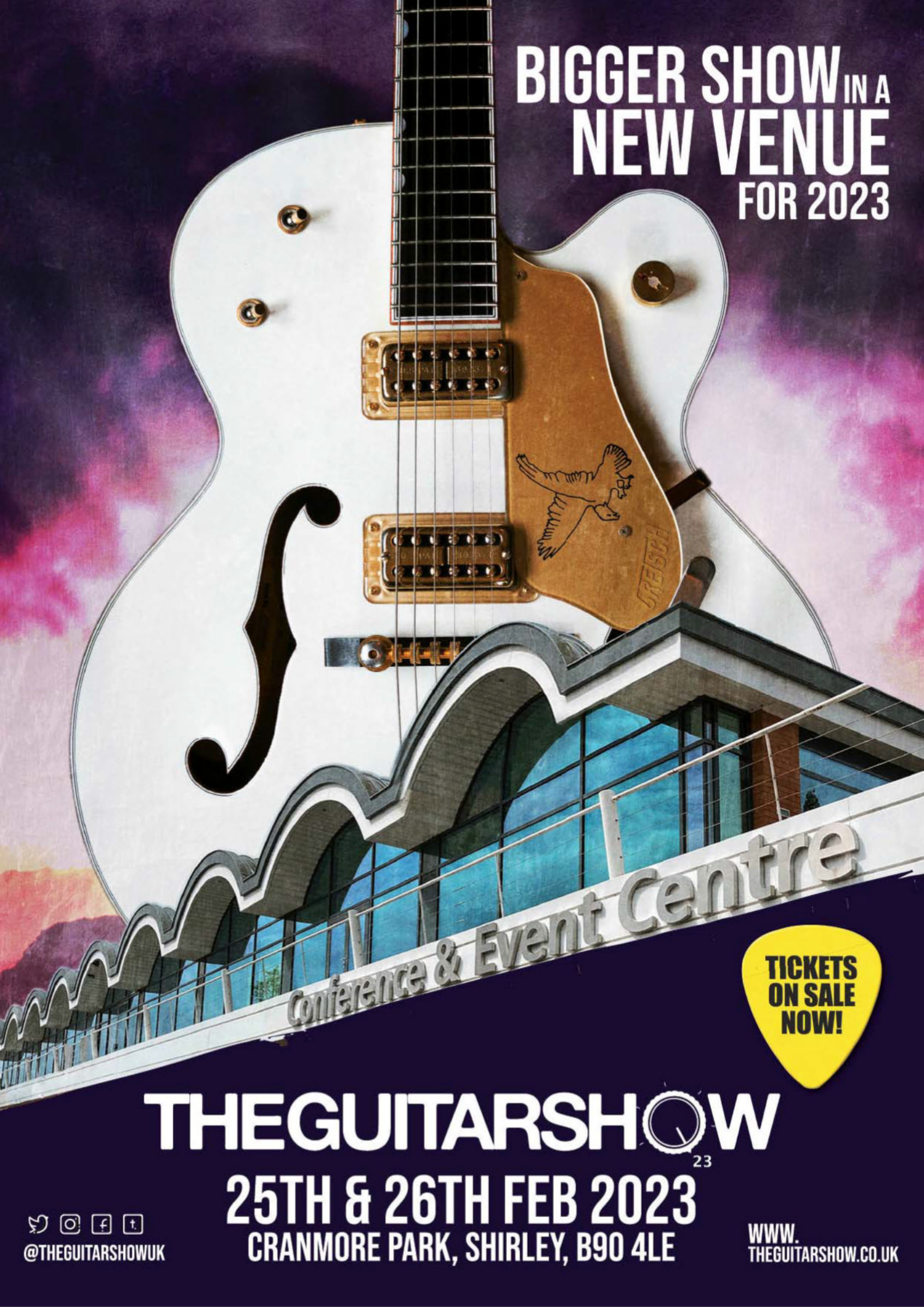
PHOTO BY ALEX BISHOP

Cutting The Nut

The blank (ideally made from bone or Corian) will need to be slightly bigger than the footprint of the old nut and then thinned out until it fits perfectly within the recess between the fingerboard and the headstock. I prefer to do this by rubbing the blank against a long strip of coarse-grit sandpaper on a flat stick, checking the blank frequently to check it fits in the slot. A line is then drawn on the front face of the blank to match the height of the frets (I use a flattened pencil). This will be curved to match the radius of the fingerboard, and then most of the excess above the line can be removed by sanding with a radius block, or simply a file.

Finally comes the crucial step of cutting in the slots. The only serious expense is a pricey set of nut files, but a good-quality set is likely to serve as a once-in-a-career purchase, and will prove indispensable if tinkering around on guitars develops into a habit. The old nut can be used to mark on the exact string spacing, but I prefer to use a string spacing rule, which is graduated to keep the gaps between the strings perfectly consistent. The slots are cut to a depth resulting in a wafer-thin gap between string and 1st fret, when fretted on the 3rd fret.

Once all six slots are precisely cut, I round over the corners for comfort and polish the nut with Micromesh pads, resulting in a professional-looking glassy smooth finish. All in all, it's a lot of work for an otherwise forgettable component of the guitar, but the end result will undoubtedly serve to improve the feel of the guitar, and at the end of the neck that really matters most. G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Clean Machine

Jamie Dickson and Nick Guppy look back on how Roland's JC-120 became the rare transistor amp that everyone loved

In recent years, advances in digital modelling amps have, at last, offered a variety of non-valve amps that most of us would be happy to use in one context or another. But prior to the digital revolution, the much-maligned analogue transistor amp was generally regarded as a poor relation to classic valve amps. There were, however, some honourable exceptions…

BB King used Lab Series amps at one point, as did Allan Holdsworth, and British-made Award Session amps were used by Clapton on his 1986 *August* album and remain well respected. But the undisputed king of solid-state amps is Roland's beefy 120-watt, chorus-equipped JC-120 – which became standard kit in studios around the world and has appeared on scores of hit records – primarily for its pristine-yet-warm clean tones.

With a special-design, limited-edition Anniversary model hitting the shops, it seemed a good moment to ask how Roland found a well of tone in transistor amps where others had come up dry. And for that, I turned to our resident amp expert Nick Guppy, who says the first key element in the amp's success was its in-built stereo chorus effect: common enough now but a rarity when the JC-120 came out.

"Nearly five decades ago, time-based modulation effects were the preserve of expensive studio equipment, so to bring out a guitar amplifier with built-in chorus and vibrato was a big deal," Nick says. "In an era when transistor amps were prone to failure and many guitarists wanted high-gain boutique valve products, Roland's JC-120 went in the opposite direction, delivering the cleanest of clean sounds with headroom to spare and proving transistors actually could be reliable."

Nick adds that chorus wasn't the only effect Roland built into its burly new combo – but it was the feature that 'broke' the JC-120 on the world stage.

"The JC-120's built-in effects included footswitchable distortion and a spring reverb on Channel 2, plus a pitch-shifting vibrato. But it was the warm analogue chorus innovation, which was generated by the now-obsolete MN3002 dual BBD chip, that catapulted the JC-120 into the stadium league. It has been used by artists all over the world for genres as diverse as African roots, reggae and metal, from Pat Metheny to The Police and Metallica. Today, every pedal builder has at least one chorus product in its line-up, but in 1975 there wasn't anything like it – and it was another year before Roland repackaged the JC-120's chorus/vibrato circuit into the equally legendary Boss CE-1.

"Real chorusing is a stereo effect, with the pitch of one channel modulated cyclically up and down, delayed by around 10ms. This is then mixed with the dry/uneffected channel to create a characteristic three-dimensional swirling sound, with the effect happening as the two sound sources combine before reaching the listener's ears. The JC-120 can do this because it's stereo, with two separate 60-watt power amplifiers each feeding a single specially designed 12-inch loudspeaker. In chorus mode, one speaker gets the pitch-modulated signal, the other is dry," Nick explains.

"In the JC-120's vibrato mode, both speakers are pitch-modulated. To record it in stereo, you need two microphones close on each speaker. The Speed and Depth controls operate in Vibrato mode only; the control settings are fixed in chorus mode and can't be altered," Nick continues.

The 50th Anniversary JC-120 has a distinctive red cherry wood veneer finish and is the sharpest-styled JC-120 we've yet seen

Fully Featured

The JC-120's other front-panel features included two footswitchable channels with high- and low-gain inputs, Bright switches, separate volume controls and independent three-band EQs. Separate footswitch jacks on the rear panel control channel-switching and effects; Channel 2's reverb came courtesy of a spring tank from OC Electronics on earlier models, with its politically incorrect 'Manufactured by beautiful girls in Milton, Wisconsin' sticker. But the amp's sustained popularity meant that periodic updates were deemed necessary.

"Over the years there have been many incremental changes to Roland's winning formula: the internal layout

A numbered badge, above, reminds you which of the limited run of 350 amps you're looking at. Other one-off features include a custom-pattern grille cloth drawing upon Japanese design heritage

has changed, the Chorus/Vibrato switch has transformed from a toggle to a rotary, and the overdrive circuit has been modified several times. Later versions from around 1986 added a mono send/stereo return effects loop.

One feature that has stayed more or less the same is the JC-120's specially designed loudspeakers. While speaker substitution has always been a hot topic, most users are happy with the JC-120 in standard configuration; as with most classics, if it isn't broken, don't try fixing it."

"The JC-120 delivered the cleanest of clean sounds with headroom to spare, proving transistors actually could be reliable"

Roland has provided a nice coda to this process of evolution with its recent 50th Anniversary JC-120 (pictured above), released somewhat mysteriously ahead of the actual anniversary of the model's introduction in 1975. There are a number of special upgrades that befit the occasion. For starters, the Anniversary model, limited to just 350 amps worldwide, features an open-pore, cherry-wood-veneer cabinet, lending it an understated boutique feel straight away, while the dark-grey grille cloth is a special pattern that draws upon Japanese visual design heritage.

There's also a commemorative, numbered badge that shows which one of the run of 350 amps is yours. Unsurprisingly, this exclusivity comes at a cost – if you can get hold of one it will set you back £1,689, around £400 more than a standard JC-120, though you do get to own the most attractive version of the JC we've seen to date, plus a little bit of tone history (and an amp that's as great-sounding as ever) for your trouble.

PHOTOS BY OLLY CURTIS

THREE TO GET READY

Ways to get that classic stereo chorus tone

Roland Jazz Chorus 40 £699

If you fancy the classic cleans of the original JC-120 in a smaller, more club-ready format, the JC-40 is a good shout. It has a 40-watt output for a still-useful amount of clean headroom, and it's compact and portable weighing just 15.9kg (35lb). Roland specially revoiced the amp, which features two 10-inch speakers, to replicate the tone of its big brother despite the drop in wattage and smaller drivers.

Boss DC-2w Dimension C £195

Boss's Dimension C stereo chorus pedal is one of the most immersive, evocative chorus effects you can have. The Waza Craft version (think of it as Boss's Custom Shop) improves on not one but two chorus classics: the original Dimension C pedal and the rackmount SDD-320 Dimension D, offering four key sounds in each mode. Plus there are further variations to be found when you engage more than one of its switch-type control buttons at once.

Boss CE-5 Chorus Ensemble £99

There are very few pedals out there that give you that pristine 80s-style chorus sound as well as Boss's reliable CE-5 Chorus Ensemble. And, at half the cost of the (admittedly different-kettle-of-fish) DC-2w featured above, it's still a brilliant option to add shimmer to your sound. Its rotary-knob controls arguably offer more control over sound-shaping, too, with concentric high- and low-cut EQ pots that help you gel it perfectly with your rig.

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Soundtrack Chords

Richard Barrett steps back into the golden era of Hollywood with these orchestral-style chord examples

The term 'soundtrack' in our title doesn't refer to music theory, it's just a broad description of the type of chord we're looking at in this feature. These chords evoke the soundtracks from the 'golden age' of Hollywood, even though this type of music was usually an orchestral arrangement, rather than solo guitar. It's an interesting challenge to see how harmonically detailed we can get with just six strings and even fewer fingers

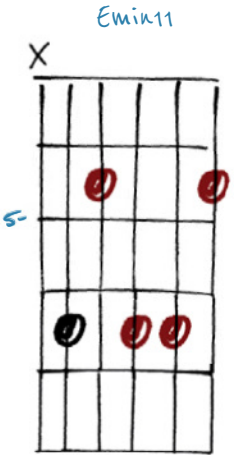
Here, we're looking at extended and altered chords based around minor, major and dominant 7ths. Often, the guitar need only extend up to the 7th and leave further extensions (9th, 11th or 13th) to the strings, woodwind or brass. However, if you've ever listened to great players such as George Barnes, Martin Taylor and George Van Eps, then you'll know that there's no reason for the guitar not to get fully involved – and it's interesting to note how different players stretch the boundaries to create interesting chords.

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

To achieve even more intricate lines, Tal Farlow would occasionally fret extra notes with his picking hand

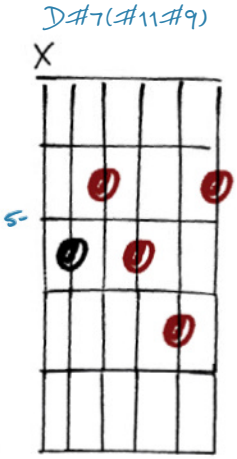
Example 1

This Emin11 builds on an Em chord with a dominant 7th, adding the 9th (F#) and, of course, the 11th (A). Note the 5th (B) is missing. This is often the case on extended voicings such as this to aid clarity. It isn't just a concession to the limited amount of fingers and strings available!



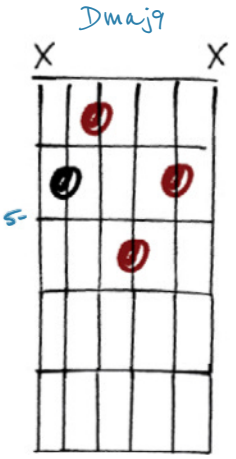
Example 2

Moving just two fingers gives us a very different chord and mood. This D#7 (#11#9) could be described as the 'tension' before the 'resolve' of a subsequent chord. Or to underscore a dramatic moment in a film, maybe it could be left to hang like a less benign version of a sus chord.



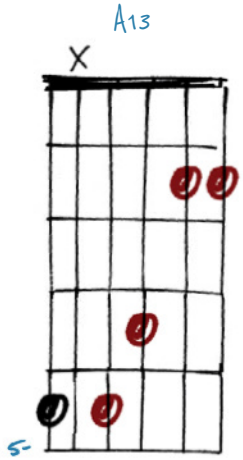
Example 3

This Dmaj9 is a great example of where you could go to resolve after Example 2. As with Example 1, we have no 5th (A in this case). From low to high we have: D (root) F#(maj3rd) C#(maj7th) F#(9th). The 'major' part of the name differentiates this from a D9, or dominant 9th.



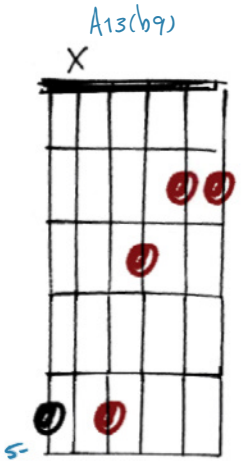
Example 4

You'll need to be sitting comfortably to manage this rather 'stretchy' A13, but the lovely way it lays out the extensions makes it worthwhile. You could use the open fifth string as your root (A) in this position, but then you'd lose the ability to move it around. I've chosen this position/key because it fits so well with the other chords.



Example 5

A slight shift within the chord gives this A13(♭9). Again, using this voicing with the muted fifth string means you can shift it to play in any key. It's easier as you move up the fretboard – and don't forget you can make things easier by omitting the root if there's a bass player to cover it!



Manson

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STAR LETTER

GO YOUR OWN WAY

"Write and play from the heart": wise words from Gordon Giltrap

What an inspiring and insightful interview with Gordon Giltrap in issue 492. I picked up the guitar again two years ago after last playing in 1970 when everyone thought they could be a rockstar. I have learnt more in the past two years about music and guitar than I ever knew existed back in the day. My two granddaughters, aged 10 and 14, are also learning and I think I agree with Gordon when I tell them to try to play your favourite songs how you feel they should sound and not exactly how your guitar heroes play them. That way you'll be adding something to the music and not just copying it.
Roy Pearson

Thanks for this, Roy, we completely agree – and even when we do try to imitate an existing musical style, we can't help but introduce our own ideas, quirks and alterations that often change it into something new. A good example of that is ska (which later morphed into rocksteady and reggae) in 1950s Jamaica, which was in part an emulation of American R&B of the era. But instead of merely replicating the loping shuffle of US R&B tunes, ska fused R&B with calypso and mento influences and the rhythmic emphasis shifted towards the off-beat. And so a new, distinct and incredibly influential musical lineage was created.

So we can see from that example and others that both imitation *and* originality are important to the vitality of music. We might perhaps say, though, that imitation without originality risks a lapse into cliché, whereas pure originality alone can yield masterpieces. Your thoughts on the subject win you this month's Star Letter prize of some superb Vox headphones.

Each issue, the Star Letter will win a pair of Vox VGH AC30 guitar amplifier headphones!
www.voxamps.com

RARE BIRD

For the attention of Neville Marten: I read with interest your article in *Guitarist* 493 with your recollections of guitars that you have bought and sold that with hindsight you should have kept (or sold sooner) if you had then had the luxury of the internet. Although you mention at the end if anyone has any guitar horror stories, my story is of amplifier regret!

Back in early 1973, I was 16 and in my last year at school and had scrimped and saved the princely sum of £39 for a better amp. One evening the local rag had an ad: Vox AC30 for sale £40. Off I went to have a look, out in the middle of nowhere, inside a mobile home with the AC30 next to a stand with a macaw on it. The guy said he used the AC30 for his disco... He then pointed to his replacement, a 1960s Marshall 100-watt head and a pair of column speakers. Argh, even rarer now!

I asked the guy if he'd take £39 for it and he said that was okay, and when I mentioned I was still at school and that was all the money I had, he then gave me a pound back so I wasn't skint. What a result. A Vox AC30 for £38.

Using the internet to try to pinpoint the date of the AC30/6 (not Top Boost) – with its black covering, with leather handles, metal vents, copper panel and Celestion Blue speakers – puts it at 1963/'64.

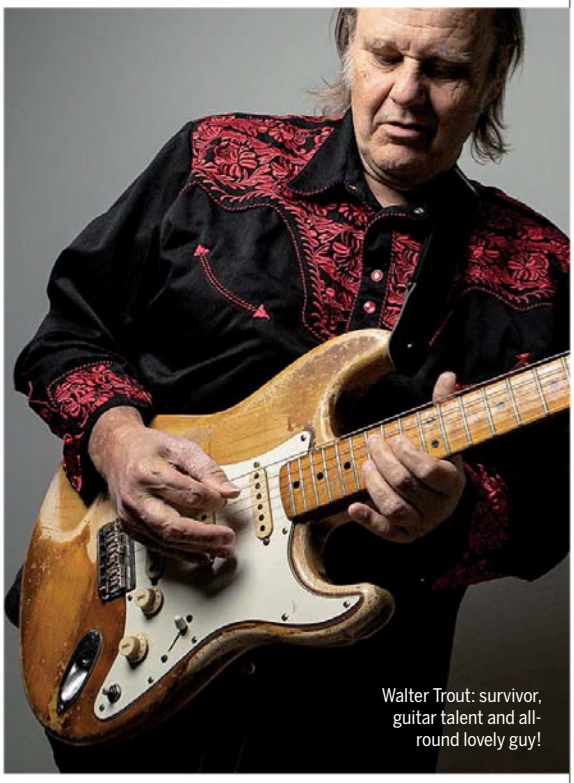
The AC30 always had a strange smell so a few days later I took the back off to be greeted by a large quantity of sunflower seed husks, courtesy of the macaw, that were toasting nicely on the chassis.

The first real use in anger, with both guitar and bass plugged in, resulted – after just two numbers – in a loud buzz and plumes of smoke. I had it repaired only to have it fail again and sold it later on in 1973 for £30 or maybe £35.

I didn't know anything about amps then, but after working all my working life as a mechanical/electrical engineer, I ironically now have the know-how on how to fix it. A great-sounding amp (when it worked) that I wish I still had.

How we all wish for a Delorean car so we can go 'Back To The Future' to put things right.
Darwyn George

Thanks, Darwyn – I think if the technology existed to go back in time to buy classic gear at bargain prices, we'd probably fit it into a long-wheelbase Transit not a Delorean sports car! You made us smile imagining the macaw dropping husks into the guts of the long-suffering AC30, which had already been forced to play disco music instead of its natural diet of riffs! Using the Bank Of England's online inflation calculator, we worked out that the £38 you paid for



Walter Trout: survivor, guitar talent and all-round lovely guy!

it in 1973 would be equivalent to £378 in today's money – not a bad deal at all, even back then.

Hindsight is 20/20, as they say, and the kicker is that we never really know which among the new guitars and amps we own will, in decades to come, prove to be a collectable classic. With so many new guitars and other gear hitting the market every year, it's hard to see how any new gear could acquire quite the cachet of 60s gear that not only set the standard for all that followed but was typically made in much lower numbers than the mass-produced products of 21st century industry. We have an inkling that it's a connection with a revered artist that will provide such cachet in future – witness how aged and signed Custom Shop signature model Gibsons have shot up in price to an astonishing degree, often proving almost as valuable as equivalent or near-equivalent vintage kit.

WALTER IS A WINNER

I've just read your great interview with the wonderful Walter Trout. What a guy. In keeping with the thread of Walter's narrative, it took me back quite a few years to the first time I saw him live.

It was at the Great British Blues Festival, in Colne Municipal Hall in Lancashire. Utterly superb show by Walter and his amazing band – who can forget [Danny 'Mongo' Abrams] Mongo's keyboard wizardry! Beautiful guitar playing by the man himself and, of course, great songs; Walter is a fine singer, too. I met him briefly after the show for a chat. What a really nice bloke he was, letting me have a little strum on his wonderful old Strat, which was incredible.

A real old-school musician, a lovely man, and a hard-working guitarist who keeps giving. Thanks for the interview with him, and great to see a mention there for the lovely Chantel McGregor, too! Rock on.

Tom Simmons

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www.BrianMayGuitars.co.uk

We heartily agree, Tom – despite the number of brickbats that life has thrown at Walter over the years, he remains one of the most humble and generous-spirited musicians we know. When it comes to the blues, some people merely talk the talk; Walter's not only walked the walk but hiked a long and sometimes difficult road that nonetheless has had its share of dazzling high spots as well. And, as you suggest, anyone who turns up to one of his shows will be the richer, musically speaking, for doing so.

BUILT FOR COMFORT

I don't know if this is a question worthy of your attention, but I cannot find something comfortable to sit on while playing my guitar. Wherever I try, I get back ache (I am 56 – no, not totally unusual). I read with great interest your articles on gear, technique, music theory and such things but never on posture. Is there any advice you or your colleagues can give? What do you sit on (if you sit; I guess standing up is an option)?
Roy Meaden

Hi Roy, there is an American company called The Guitar Chair that makes an armless, folding hardwood chair that's specifically designed, with input from a physical therapist, to provide comfortable support for guitarists during performance. We've not tried it ourselves so can't speak to its success as a design, but maybe worth checking out at https://originalguitarchair.com. Personally, we enjoy standing to practise – with a longish lead you can stroll about as you play, keeping the back limber. Maybe avoid that boat anchor 70s Les Paul for long sessions, though!

Dave Burnett's glorious 1940s Fender De Luxe Lap Steel, a predecessor of the celebrated Telecaster

TELE TESTIMONIALS

I enjoyed the Telecaster Issue [494] – not the usual stories or models, which made it all the more interesting. Regarding switch mods, I've recently installed a Free-Way switch in one of my Teles and can now get all the Baja Tele switching options without affecting the look of the guitar or adding any extra switches. It operates like a normal Tele switch but also has an up/down operation that enables a second 'bank' of three switch options, which is really simple to use. I have it wired for two out-of-phase options and the series option (full sound like a humbucker). I have more ready to drop into my other Teles and a five-way version (with 10 switch options) for drop into a Strat. Well worth looking at.
Dave Woolger

First of all congratulations on your great mag, which I've enjoyed for many years. I also really liked your Telecaster issue and the Telecaster features. Regarding page 54 'Telecaster Tales' [on some of Well Strung Guitars' rare collection], I love Telecasters and have owned many of them over the 60-odd years I've been playing in bands. However, as a proud owner of a 1940s Fender De Luxe Lap Steel [pictured below] (not to be confused with the 1950s Deluxe model; the 1946 to '47 model has a red Wah-Wah button and De Luxe are two separate words) I was mildly disappointed that there was no mention of Leo's lap steels, which were the embryos of his Broadcasters/Telecasters guitars. Mine has serial number 976, which possibly makes it the oldest Fender guitar in the UK. The birth of the Telecaster, pre-Telecaster. All the twangy best.
Dave Burnett

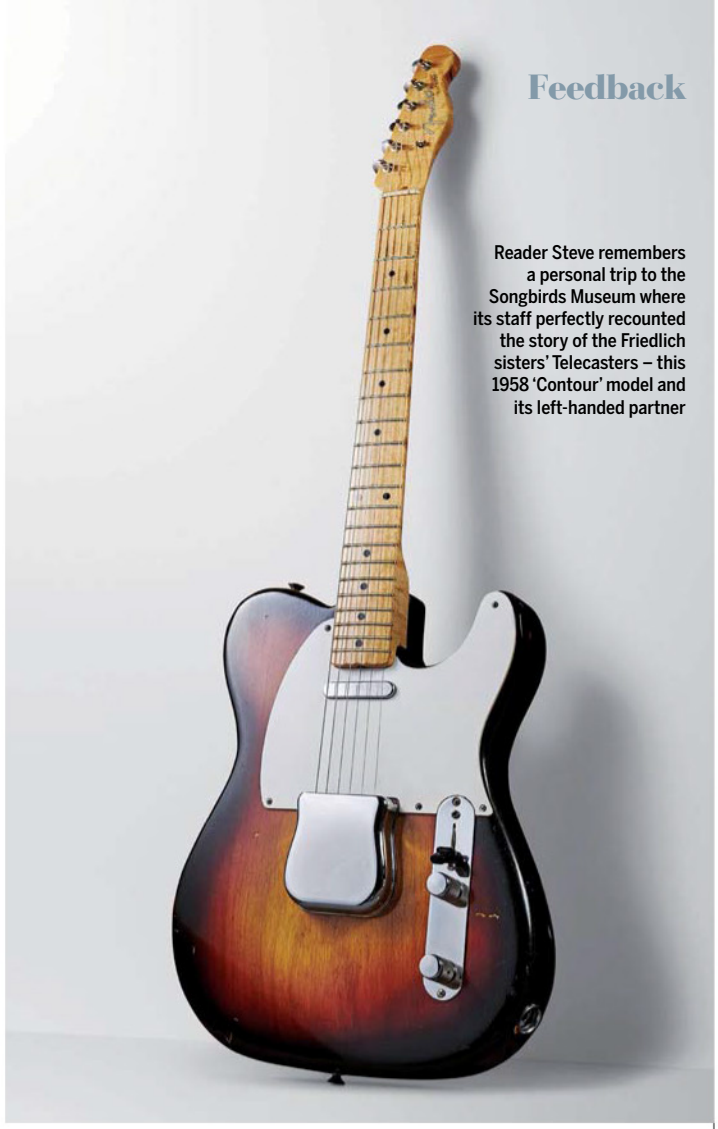
Glad you all enjoyed the Tele issue, guys. Apologies we didn't mention the Tele's antecedents in Leo's lap steel instruments, Dave B, but that might make a nice feature for another day. And when it comes to mods, we think the both-pickups-in-series option is incredibly useful – it almost grants you a PAF-like option with a good balance of bite and heft and can be fitted to work via a push-pull tone pot so your Tele's traditional looks aren't spoiled. Levinson's onboard boost on its Tele-style electrics of the past was also a mod that worked well, we think, achieving the same sort of result – a fatter lead sound to really help T-style guitars cover hotter, gainier ground.

SONGBIRDS REMEMBERED

Hi all, I just had to comment on an article from issue 494. Firstly, thanks for a great magazine; I have been an avid reader for years. I have been playing all sorts for 58 years and have now gone full circle and gone back to mainly acoustic music by myself at open mic nights. The reason for this mail to you is because of the great Telecaster issue, which brought back so many great memories.

It started back in September 2017 when my very best friend Dave Colman and myself undertook a boys' own trip to the USA. We went to Nashville and completed all of the usual sights, including seeing

Your letters to the *Guitarist* editor. Drop us a line at guitarist@futurenet.com



Reader Steve remembers a personal trip to the Songbirds Museum where its staff perfectly recounted the story of the Friedlich sisters' Telecasters – this 1958 'Contour' model and its left-handed partner

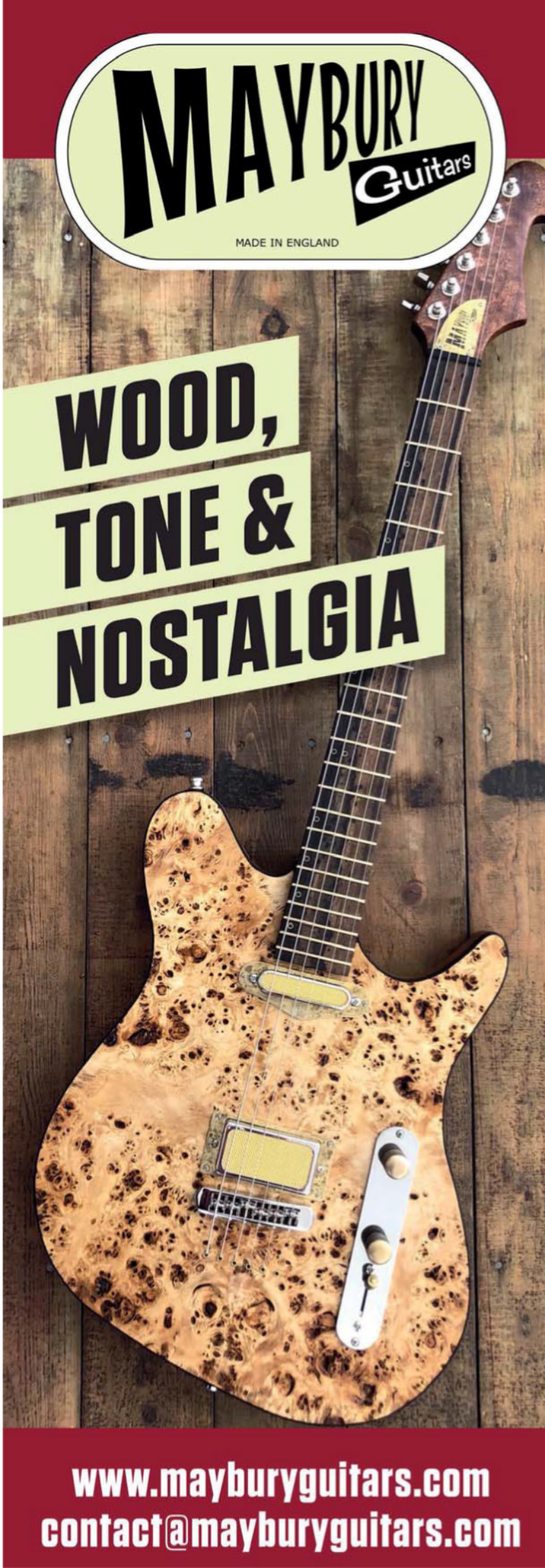
the Tele-playing John of the Brothers Osborne at The Grand Ole Opry. We then hired a car and went down to Chattanooga to the wonderful Songbirds Museum. What a place! We had a guided tour, along with just another couple from America, of the whole place.

Now, the reason for my ramblings, after reading Dave Davidson's article about the Friedlich sisters' Telecasters, I can confirm that the tour guide on the day explained to us the story of these great guitars, just as Dave had promised the sisters he would. You will appreciate trying to take in all the marvellous history and facts that day was breathtaking, but reading the great story brought it all back.

Steve Barnwell

PS. Please tell Neville Marten I have taken his advice, from his great page in issue 492, and have changed my bridge pins in my Gibson Songwriter and my 51-year-old Suzuki 'Hummingbird' to bone ones on his advice to improve their sounds.

Thanks for your memories of the Songbirds Museum, Steve – it's still open to the public, but it seems to be more of a general music museum now, with only a relatively small number of guitars on display. But it's gratifying to hear David Davidson scrupulously kept his promise to keep the memory of the Friedlich sisters' music alive when the museum was in its pomp, back when it hosted many of the rarest guitars in the world. If you're passing Farmingdale, New York, a trip to Well Strung Guitars will grant you a look at a good many of the best guitars that Songbirds used to play host to, however.



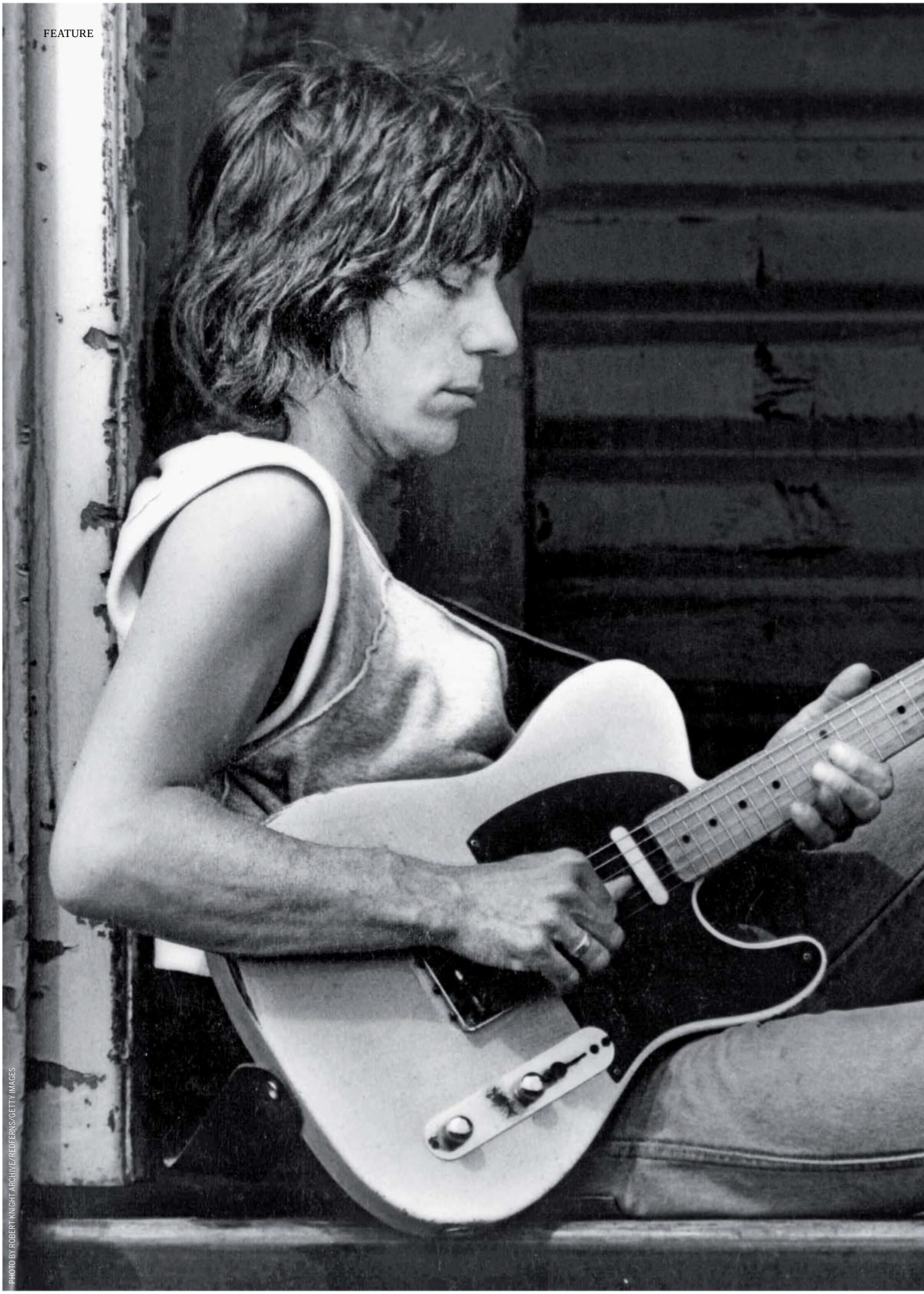
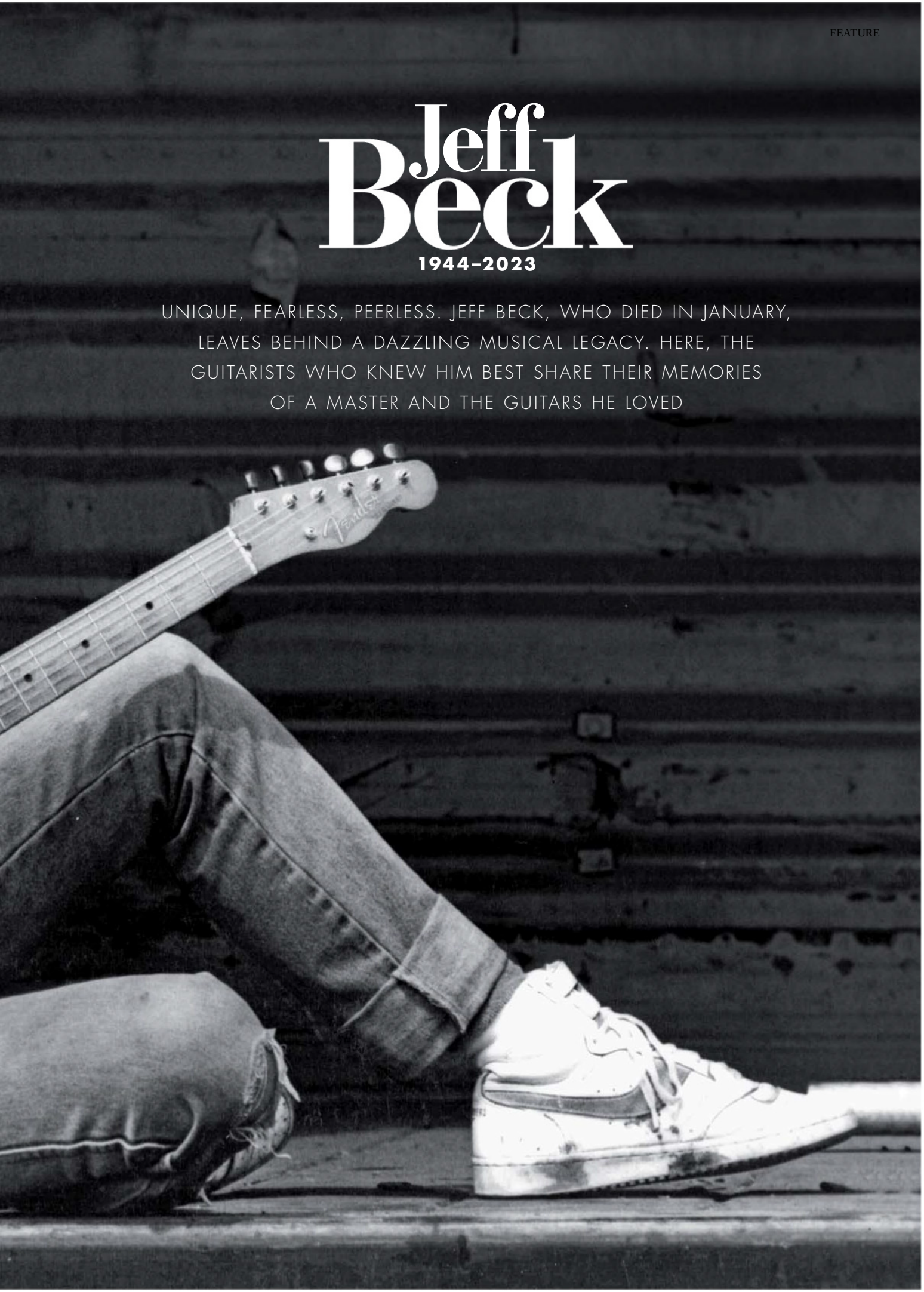


PHOTO BY ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Jeff Beck

1944–2023

UNIQUE, FEARLESS, PEERLESS. JEFF BECK, WHO DIED IN JANUARY, LEAVES BEHIND A DAZZLING MUSICAL LEGACY. HERE, THE GUITARISTS WHO KNEW HIM BEST SHARE THEIR MEMORIES OF A MASTER AND THE GUITARS HE LOVED



LIFE OF A PIONEER

From the rebellious square peg of Swinging London to the still-questing elder statesman of the post-millennium, Jeff Beck reimagined the electric guitar as a magic wand in a career that could be both spellbinding and maddening

Words Henry Yates

Among the golden generation of British guitarists who rose in the sweatbox clubs of 60s London, Jeff Beck was the great magician and lifelong contrarian. While peers such as Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page certainly boasted an eye-popping virtuosity and knack for melody, their playing was not unfathomable but squarely rooted in the American blues, revving up its stock vocabulary of slides, bends and pentatonics.

Beck could match his circuit-mates at these traditional Delta-derived shapes: revisit such masterclasses as *Steeled Blues* or *Going Down*. But while most Brit-boomers approached their work with a scholarly deference, their scarecrow-haired contemporary had a renegade streak. "If I don't break the rules at least 10 times in every song," Beck once reasoned, "then I'm not doing my job properly."

On a good night, when Beck played guitar, all tactile fingers and smeared notes, the instrument became something else – a lightning rod for otherworldly tones and textures, a multi-tool for sonic mischief the like of which only Hendrix was conjuring in that fertile period.

Over time, his technique would become a tapestry almost impossible to unpick. A flick of the fingers, a shiver of whammy bar, a swell from his Strat volume dials that evoked whale song. "It was like, 'What's he playing?'" remembers Phil Collen of Def Leppard. "It was like the first time you heard Eddie Van Halen tapping. Jeff Beck was like that his whole life."

And while that same wave of 60s guitar gods – or at least, those who lived – would rapidly eclipse Beck in fame, fortune and sales figures, leaving their old friend to be occasionally cast as rock's great underachiever, all acknowledged his touch was the unattainable gold standard and his discography the boldest in their class.

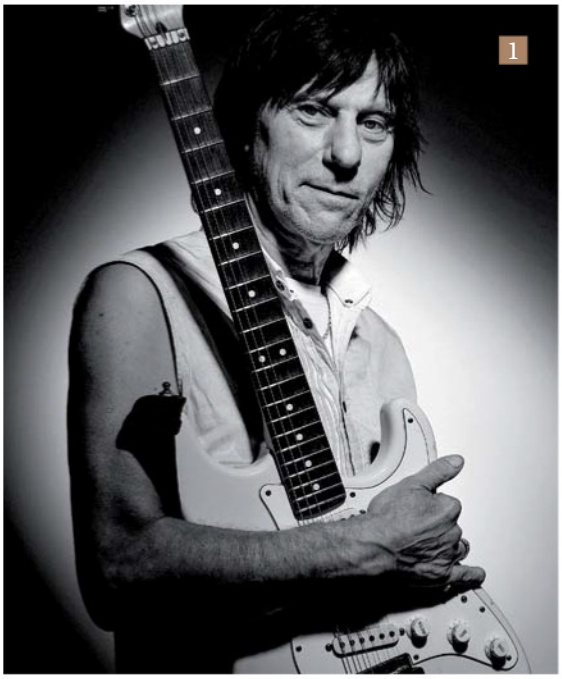


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PHOTO BY JOBBY SESSIONS

1. Always one with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, Beck once remarked: "If I don't break the rules at least 10 times in every song, then I'm not doing my job properly..."

"The six-stringed warrior is no longer here for us to admire the spell he could weave around our mortal emotions," wrote Beck's former Yardbirds bandmate, Jimmy Page, as black news broke of the 78-year-old's sudden death from bacterial meningitis. "His technique unique. His imagination apparently limitless. Jeff, I will miss you along with your millions of fans."

Born in South London on 24 June 1944, Geoffrey Arnold Beck had his antennae up. Cliff Gallup and Chet Atkins inspired his weave of top-line melody and thumbed bass, while BB King was another early favourite, the bluesman's eerie 'one-note' style discernible in future Beck instrumentals like *Where Were You*. But it says much that a defining formative influence was Les Paul and Mary Ford's 1951 take on *How High The Moon*, the British pre-teen entranced by its multi-tracked manipulations. "At six years old, everything is new and exciting," he reflected, "but that never left me, the sound of that."

Having built his first cigar-box guitars, then fast-talked hire purchase companies into leasing him the real thing, Beck's studies at Wimbledon College Of Art bled into shifts with Screaming Lord Sutch and assorted nearlymen – The Nightshift, the Rumbles, the Tridents – before 1965 saw him handed the poisoned chalice of replacing Clapton in The Yardbirds.

Beck didn't blink. Having wiped his illustrious forebear from the fans' memories ("At The Marquee, I showed them what was what and got a standing ovation"), the newcomer set about bending The Yardbirds to his vision, introducing the feedback and fuzz of *Stroll On* and the Tone Bender-driven sitar emulation on *Heart Full Of Soul*. Yet the gear was moot. "With Jeff, it's all in his fingers," Clapton once said, and with the guitarist eschewing a plectrum, that was literally true. As an aside, those same digits would latterly be insured for £7 million after Beck chopped off the tip of his index finger while making a stew.

Remarkably, Beck's maverick tendencies dovetailed with The Yardbirds' most successful commercial spell. But if things

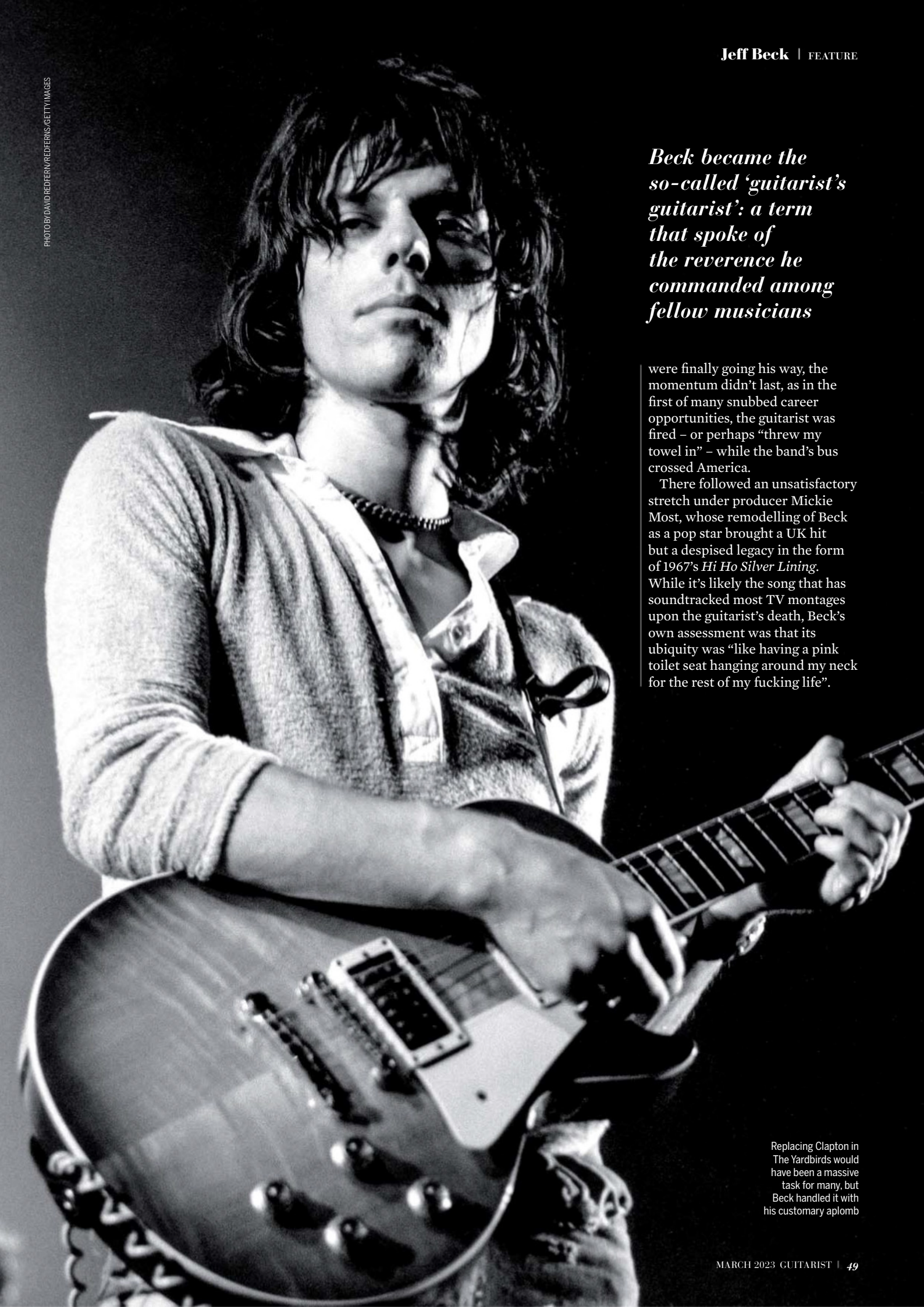


PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Beck became the so-called 'guitarist's guitarist': a term that spoke of the reverence he commanded among fellow musicians

were finally going his way, the momentum didn't last, as in the first of many snubbed career opportunities, the guitarist was fired – or perhaps "threw my towel in" – while the band's bus crossed America.

There followed an unsatisfactory stretch under producer Mickie Most, whose remodelling of Beck as a pop star brought a UK hit but a despised legacy in the form of 1967's *Hi Ho Silver Lining*. While it's likely the song that has soundtracked most TV montages upon the guitarist's death, Beck's own assessment was that its ubiquity was "like having a pink toilet seat hanging around my neck for the rest of my fucking life".

Replacing Clapton in The Yardbirds would have been a massive task for many, but Beck handled it with his customary aplomb

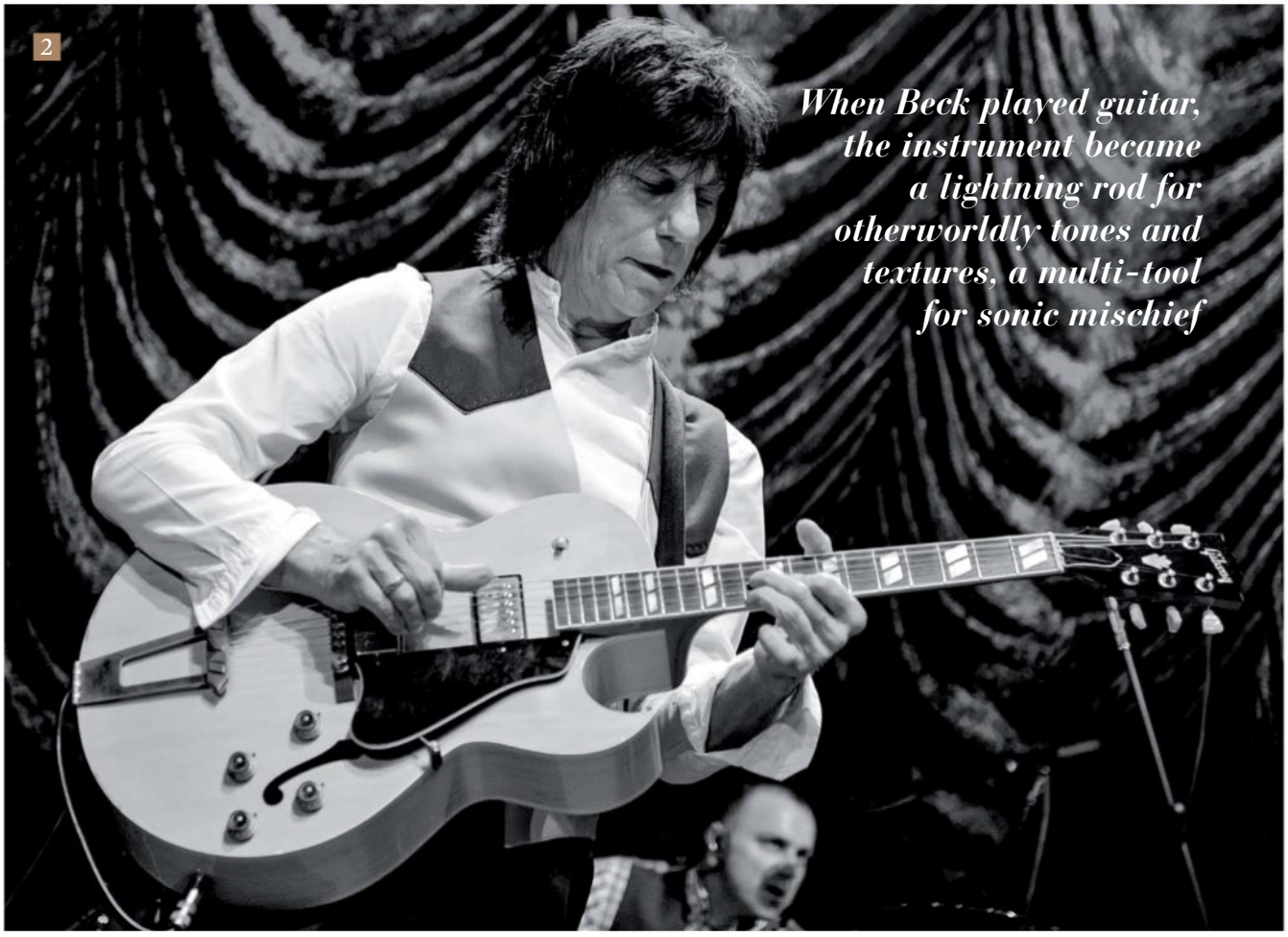


PHOTO BY KYLE GUSTAFSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

Fortunately, Beck was on the brink of what many consider his best work, recruiting Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood to flank him in The Jeff Beck Group and craft the heavy blues and nascent psychedelia of 1968's *Truth*. Much of Beck's greatest gold can be panned here and on 1969's sequel *Beck-Ola* – respectively, revisit the wah-fattened take on Willie Dixon's *I Ain't Superstitious* and the rollicking power-blues stomp of *Spanish Boots*.

But the personnel scattered shortly after Beck fired Wood and ducked the chance to play Woodstock. "Apparently, he'd got wind from somewhere of a rumour, which turned out to be false, that his missus was having an affair with the gardener," wrote Stewart, "so he was quite keen to go home."

It was typical of an artist who always took the path of most resistance – and frustrating to think where Beck's career might have flown with Stewart remaining his counterpoint on vocals. Likewise, had the guitarist played his cards differently, he could have joined The Rolling Stones in the mid-70s but chose instead to reject the stadium league in favour of the freeform joy he had witnessed on tour with John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra.

2. A life-long fan of Cliff Gallup from Gene Vincent's band, rockabilly was yet another facet of Jeff Beck's playing

3. Having been offered the chance to join The Rolling Stones, Jeff turned it down as he believed it would compromise his free-falling agenda

"It was the refinement of McLaughlin that presented a way out for me," he told the *New Statesman*. "Arriving at the soundcheck and watching him and the sax player trading solos, I thought, 'This is me.' He has such knowledge of scales, and he tells the story within the scale. Playing with McLaughlin and then The Stones – dang, dang, dang – can you imagine?"

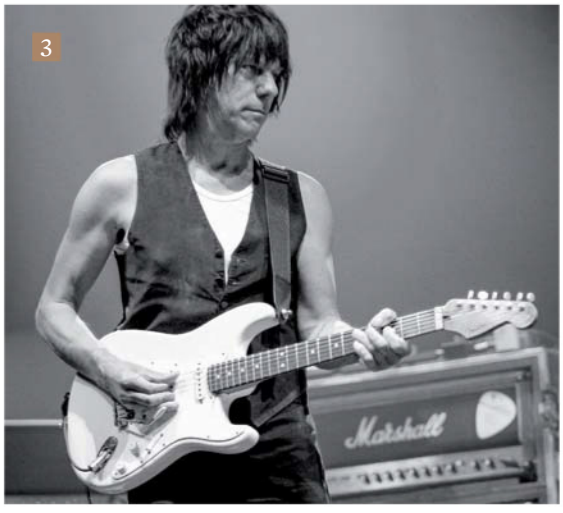


PHOTO BY HARRY HERD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

While his accountant presumably howled, Beck's single-mindedness paid off with 1975's George Martin-produced *Blow By Blow*: an instrumental masterpiece of jazz-tinged adventurism, whose riches included the driving *Freeway Jam*, the talk box reboot of The Beatles' *She's A Woman*, and the keening leads of *Cause We've Ended As Lovers*. "Eric said to me, 'I'm telling you, if you don't sing, it's going to be tough,'" recalled Beck of an album that reached US No 4. "And it was tough. But then, I can turn around and say, '*Blow By Blow*, put that in your pipe and smoke it, mate.'"

From there, Beck seemed emboldened, and while his contemporaries softened into autopilot blues or curatorship of past glories, the guitarist's path as a recording artist became impossible to plot. His was a discography that could veer from 1973's dirtbox jam *Superstition* with Tim Bogert and Carmine Appice, through 1985's pop-leaning *Flash* album (helmed by Nile Rodgers) to the techno bent of 1999's *Who Else!*. And all spiced with guest spots that segued from the astonishing slide break on Jon Bon Jovi's *Blaze Of Glory* to Roger Waters' *Amused To Death* album.

(PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES)

4. On stage with Billy Squier (left) and another of Jeff's all-time heroes, Les Paul

5. Bonamassa notes that Beck was "the greatest that ever touched a guitar..."

"I still don't know how he does it," said the former Pink Floyd bassist. "He's incredibly technically gifted in ways the rest of us can't even begin to think about."

Along the way, as it dawned that Beck would never be a megastar, he fell instead into his status as the so-called 'guitarist's guitarist': a term that spoke of the reverence he commanded among fellow musicians and hinted at his disinterest in the big-time. From Tony Iommi ("There will never be another") to Steve Hackett ("He made the electric guitar sing"), the old guard were unanimous in their praise upon Beck's passing.

It's notable, though, that from Johnny Marr to Jack White, the wider tributes spoke of a musician with a cross-generational thumbprint. "To say we are all devastated is an understatement," wrote Joe Bonamassa. "I simply cannot get my head around it. The greatest that ever touched a guitar."

Like any genius, Beck could be frustrating. He ditched genres and disbanded line-ups when there was gas left in the tank. His weakest instrumentals veered into muzak, while on stage, he could be inconsistent. "Beck takes a chance every night," Ritchie Blackmore once noted. "Sometimes he's absolutely useless and you wonder why he's got a name. Other times he pulls things off that sound like nothing you've heard before."

To witness Jeff Beck at full flight was to see a musician at one with his instrument in a state of pure expression

Yet it's the nights of wonder that we'll remember. To witness Beck at full flight was to see a musician at one with his instrument in a state of pure expression. And while the mainstream media's obituaries will be more lavish when the multi-platinum galacticos of the 60s check out, the connoisseurs know the death of Jeff Beck marks the exit of an all-time giant.

"Jeff was wild, he was unquantifiable and extraordinarily difficult to understand, but one of the greatest guitar geniuses the world has ever seen and will ever see," said Brian May in a video tribute. "He brought an amazing voice to rock music which will never, ever be emulated or equalled." G

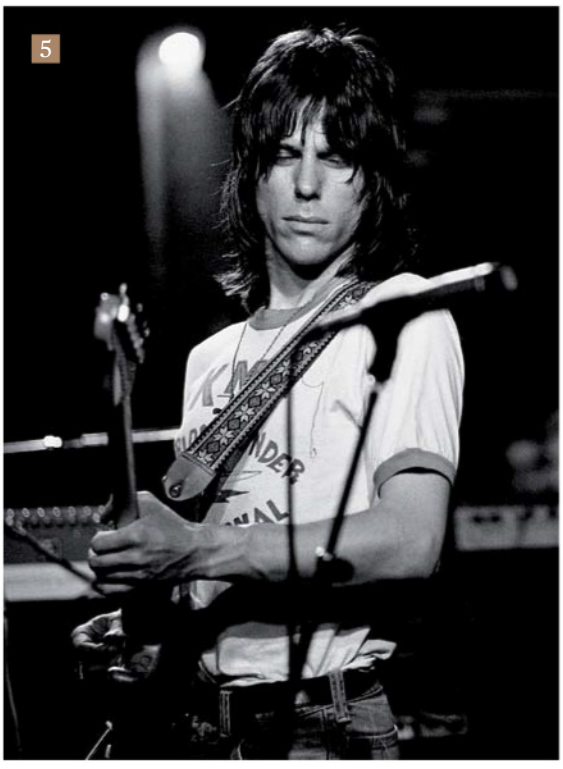


PHOTO BY WATALASANUMA/SHINKOMUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

THERE'S NO OTHER ME

The guitar world has been shaken to the core at the loss of one of its most original voices and many players wanted to share a personal note of loss, an anecdote, or a tribute to a man who played such an important role in their musical lives

Compiled By David Mead

MARTIN BARRE

"I first met Jeff when I was recording music with Hilton Valentine of The Animals in around 1967 in London. We didn't know he was putting a solo on the song, so when he walked through the studio, my jaw hit the floor. He borrowed my guitar, found an old amp in a corner of the room and the room came alive!

"Tull played with Jeff and Rod Stewart in the States in 1969 and, again, I was very much in awe of his presence. To hear him play and then have to follow on the same stage was one of the hardest lessons that I ever learnt. He inspired me and, unknowingly, helped me come to terms with performing alongside the best musicians on the planet.

"To be unique in the world of guitar playing is a very special quality and he had that and more. It speaks volumes that he could be immediately recognised by his sound, his technique and his understated approach to music. I share his passion for vintage cars, but will never come close to sharing his ability to create the magic and majesty he had playing guitar. Jeff took English rock guitar to the States and the impact he created will reverberate forever."

JENNIFER BATTEN

"We were playing a double bill in Rio with Wayne Shorter. We were in the middle of the glorious *Where Were You* duet – just the two of us. I was triggering Tony Hymas-esque synth pads when Jeff broke a string. His tech always had an eye on him and immediately brought him a new guitar while I sustained a chord. He started to carry on with the song when the new guitar went belly up with a horrendous jack buzz. He got so upset with the failure because he was so deeply emotionally invested in the tune, that he took off the faulty guitar and smashed it into the stage. There were seconds there where my life flashed before my eyes as I once again sustained the harmony wondering what came next, until he stormed off the stage in defeat.

"I'd heard about this behaviour from his early years but had never been a part of it. Soon it was obvious it was over and I put down my guitar and headed backstage to find him extremely upset. It's *that* kind of vested emotion and sensitivity that made him the best vessel for music possible. I *do* know how lucky I was to have been a part of his life and music."

1

PHOTO BY MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

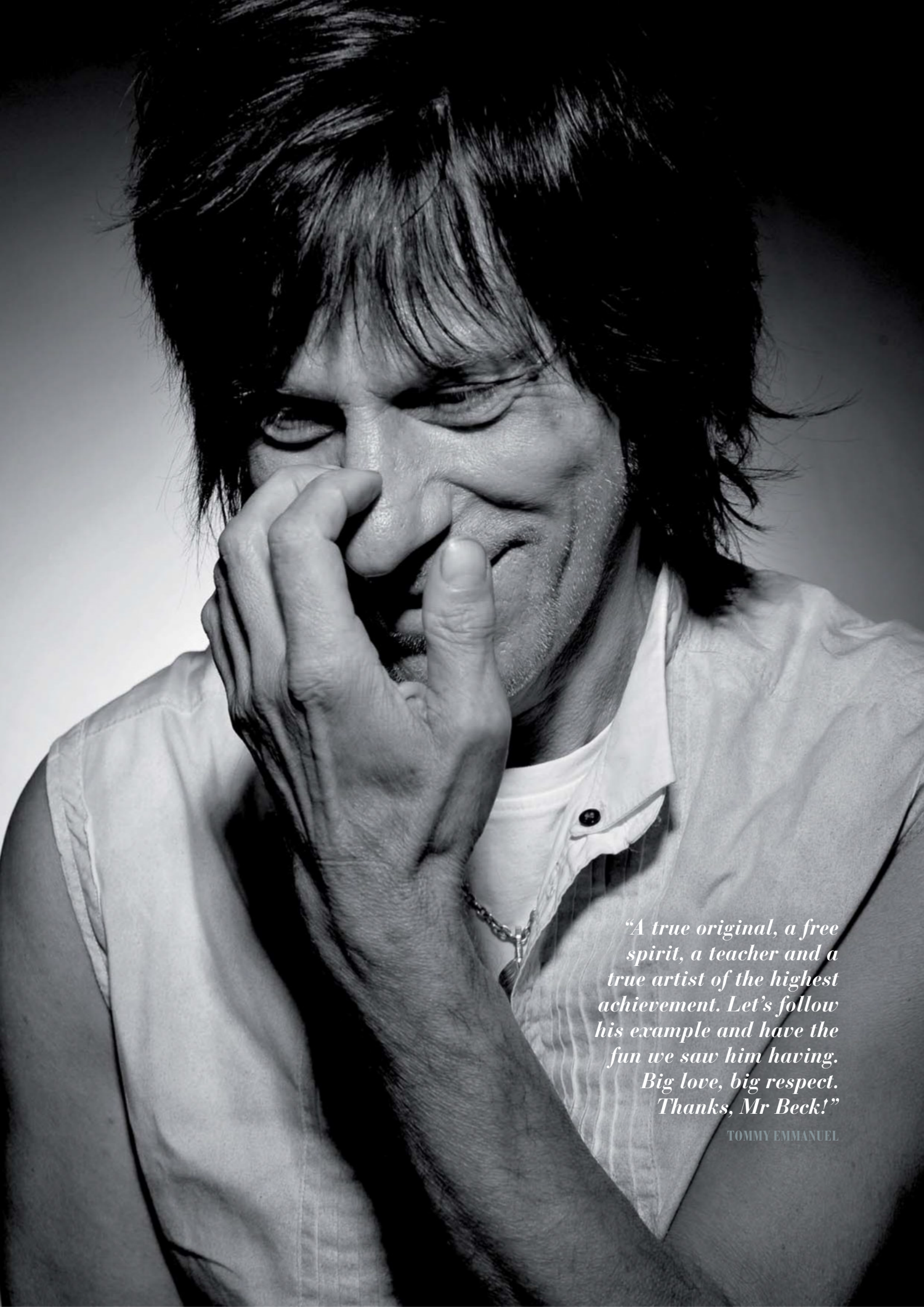
"Jeff Beck was a miracle… But the thing that struck me the most was his teenage-like sense of humour. He loved to laugh" STEVE VAI

1. Jennifer Batten played guitar and guitar synth in Beck's touring band from 1999 to 2001 and appears on the studio albums *Who Else!* and *You Had It Coming*

JOE BONAMASSA

"Without Jeff Beck, none of us would play the guitar the way we do. My introduction to the blues was through the song *Let Me Love You* off a record called *Truth* that was recorded at Abbey Road Studios in 1968. I have met Jeff a few times and he was always gracious and funny, but, most importantly, he was such a brilliant musician."

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS



"A true original, a free spirit, a teacher and a true artist of the highest achievement. Let's follow his example and have the fun we saw him having. Big love, big respect. Thanks, Mr Beck!"

TOMMY EMMANUEL

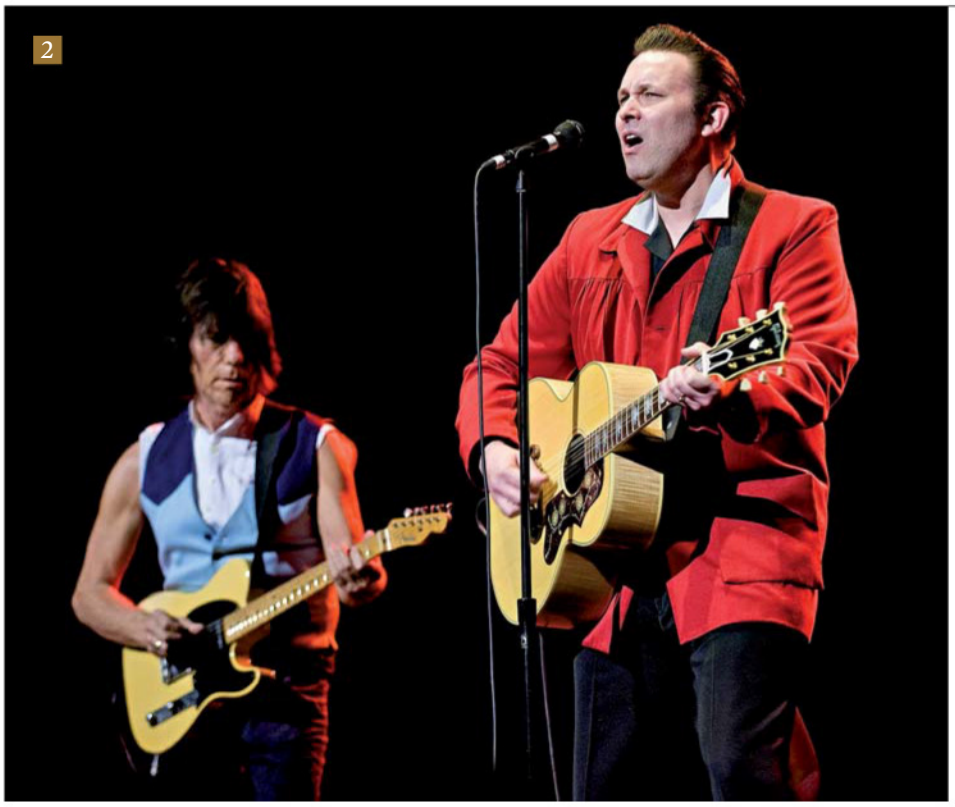


PHOTO BY LYLE A. WAISMAN/GETTY IMAGES

2. Rockabilly guitarist (and, as it turns out, fellow muscle car enthusiast) Darrel Higham on stage with Beck at the Cadillac Palace Chicago in 2011

3. Jeff joins Brian May on stage to celebrate Freddie Mercury's 65th birthday at the 'Freddie For A Day' concert at London's Savoy Hotel on 5 September 2011

TOMMY EMMANUEL

"It was my brother, Phil, who brought my attention to the wonders of Jeff Beck. He sat me down in front of his stereo, turned on *Blow By Blow* and blew my mind, causing me to search for a better tone, better ideas, to find every Beck recording I could find and soak it into my body and soul. Nobody has ever, will ever, play guitar like Beck. A true original, a free spirit, a teacher and a true artist of the highest achievement! Every time I've seen him play I saw that he gave it all for his audience and for his own needs. He left it *all* out there. Let's follow his example and have the fun we saw him having. Big love, big respect. Thanks, Mr Beck!"

JOHN ETHERIDGE

"I saw Jeff Beck for the first time just after he'd joined The Yardbirds in 1965 at the Windsor Ricky Tick. He was playing a Telecaster with Vox AC30. The Yardbirds specialised in extended 'freak out' jams that would build to a furious crescendo. This suited Jeff, I think. He was basically the same player as in 2022 – the combination of bluesiness, tangential phrasing, feedback, slide, subversive melodic turns was all there. He wanted to mess up your expectations! After that I saw him many times, with the great group with Rod Stewart, the *There And Back* tour and most recently at The O2.

"I did actually play alongside him at The Secret Policeman's Other Ball in 1981. He was supposedly playing *Cause We've Ended As Lovers* with Clapton as a duet. But in the rehearsal, when it came to the D/C chord in the bridge, Eric wasn't up for it and pointed at me to say, 'You do it.' So I did. (I'm a vague silhouette on a YouTube clip!) Jeff was playing the Tele, sounded fantastic and with so little gear – a Roland Space Echo and Boss Super Overdrive. There can never be anyone like that again."

STEVE HACKETT

"Jeff Beck's passing is a huge loss. He was the greatest innovator of our time and a huge influence on myself and many others. He transformed the guitar into a multi-faceted instrument, sometimes sounding like a voice, at other times like a sax with his explosive approach and complete mastery of tone. He constantly blew us all away with each new offering. His original use of distortion and echo often gave an eerie quality. Just when you thought the guitar could do no more, he would manage to push the boundaries further each time. He could thrill you, make you laugh, spook you and challenge you to stretch beyond your own limitations. Whether he was playing a Les Paul or a Stratocaster, the sound was always uniquely his own. There will never be another like him."

"Without Jeff Beck, none of us would play the guitar the way we do. He was gracious, funny… such a brilliant musician" JOE BONAMASSA

DARREL HIGHAM

"Jeff had not long bought a new Corvette. It was a modern monster of a car. I had poodled down to Jeff's house in my '61 Ford Zodiac and Jeff was laughing at how slow it was. He said, 'Come on, jump in my new car and I'll take you for a spin around the country lanes.' So in I got and immediately Jeff floored this beast and we went hurtling down the lanes around his village. I was absolutely terrified, genuinely terrified at that. He pulled over and said, 'Right, your turn.' I was horrified that he wanted me to drive this bloody thing and politely declined. He wouldn't have it and eventually I got out of the passenger seat and sat behind the wheel. I very gingerly pulled out of the lay-by and was driving like a blind old man when Jeff shouted over at me, 'Floor it, for fuck's sake.' So I did and terrified myself even more."

STEVE LUKATHER

"I have said this many times in my life: that I think Jeff was God's guitar player. Now he really is. Too soon. His playing hit me so hard and has stayed with me my whole life. No-one will *ever* be close to him. The most original voice on guitar I have ever heard and loved by us all. We did a few tours together years ago in Japan and I got to see it up close every night. Blew minds every time. Ask any of us guitar players who *the* man is: the answer is always Jeff Beck. I am honoured I could call him an old friend as well. He shall be so missed."

PHOTO BY DAVE M. BENETT/GETTY IMAGES

"His playing made the guitar a voice in the fullest meaning of the word – in his hands it could communicate every emotion"

BRIAN MAY

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

"Yet another immense loss. Jeff was one of the greatest guitarists ever. He was beyond genre, simply a marvellous guitarist. Not only, he was also a delightful human being. I'm grieving..."

HANK MARVIN

"*Where Were You* by Jeff Beck is a haunting composition, beautifully played. Go the whammy bar! I've never tried it – I know my limitations. But it was really inspirational, reaffirming how expressive a Strat can be in the right hands. Thank you, Jeff."

BRIAN MAY

"I feel a profound sadness at losing him from our lives – and a profound regret at not staying closer the last few years. Jeff was a master magician, mysterious and unfathomable. Much more than a guitar player, he made the guitar into what sounded like a different instrument altogether. His playing made the guitar a voice in the fullest meaning of the word – in his hands it could communicate every emotion. I just don't have the words to describe what a presence he was for us all and I will never really understand how he did what he did. I've often felt it must have been similar to watching Mozart at work, and wondering where that genius came from. Jeff's exquisite tone, expression and invention will haunt us all forever."

DOMINIC MILLER

"I got to know Jeff when he opened for us on Sting's *Brand New Day* tour of 2000. I stood side stage every night marvelling at the sounds coming from his hands, which were nothing short of supernatural. He was also a very kind man and extremely funny. It's almost unthinkable that we'll never hear him play again in real time. The guitar community bows its head."

PHOTO BY WWW.CHRISTOPHBOMBART-PHOTOGRAPHY.COM

PHOTO BY THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"Just when you thought the guitar could do no more, he would manage to push the boundaries further each time" STEVE HACKETT

JOE SATRIANI

"Jeff Beck's music is part of my foundation as a guitarist. He was an innovator whose musicianship will always be a source of joy and inspiration for me."

MARTIN TAYLOR

"When I was in Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, we played a concert at the Royal Festival Hall and Ronnie Wood was on it. As I was heading back to the stage after soundcheck, Ronnie was standing there with Jeff and he introduced us and we started talking about jazz guitar. I was playing in London about a week after that at a theatre in Bloomsbury and Jeff came along and I figured he was gonna sit in because when I got there to do the soundcheck, there was a small Marshall amp and a white Strat on the stage! So I played a solo set, and then he came up and we played *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat*. I remember asking him about playing with Stevie Wonder on the *Talking Book* album. He told me that he went to the studio in New York, sat down and played that famous solo on *Lookin' For Another Pure Love* and when Stevie says, 'Do it, Jeff...' during the solo, Jeff told me, 'I knew that my career was safe forever.'"

4. Jeff Beck opened for Sting back in 2000 where Dominic Miller would watch the master from the side of the stage every night. Here, Beck joins Sting on stage at Madison Square Garden in 2009

STEVE VAI

"Jeff Beck was a miracle. I see him as the chosen one. His touch on the instrument created profoundly beautiful soundscapes that held the heart of the listener in its intoxicating heaven. No other guitar player has evolved so dramatically past their prime as he did, and at 78 years of age he played as if he was still in his prime. It's impossible to quantify his hallucinogenic wizardry. I was fortunate enough to have met him four or five times and he was always so kind, warm and engaging. But the thing that struck me the most was his teenage-like sense of humour. He loved to laugh. Jeff was 78 but also 17."

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HEART FULL OF SOUL

Whitesnake hero Bernie Marsden recalls the Jeff Beck he knew – quick-witted, funny and so brilliant on the guitar that even his peers knew they couldn't come near to his freedom on the fretboard, only surrender to it

Words Jamie Dickson

For Bernie Marsden, Jeff Beck's sudden and unanticipated death on 10 January cut especially deep. Bernie got to know Jeff through a friend, drummer Cozy Powell. When they met, Bernie was already a devoted fan of Beck's playing, but, soon enough, he was able to call him a friend as well. Bernie's admiration for Jeff's guitar work did not diminish with familiarity, however, and Bernie says that the bombshell news of Beck's death felt "like losing a member of the family". Here, Bernie shares his memories of the great guitarist, including Beck's often-overlooked sense of humour, and recalls gigs when Jeff's genius on the instrument moved him to both laughter and tears.

When did you first become aware of Jeff's playing?

"As soon as I heard *Heart Full Of Soul* with The Yardbirds, really. Because at that point, which was around 1965 or 1966, I was 15, something like that, I was tinkering around with guitar. And then suddenly, this mate of mine said, 'Have you heard this guy? Have you heard The Yardbirds?' I said, 'Well, yeah, I know the Yardbirds because I've got *Five Live Yardbirds*,' you know? And he said, 'No, no, no – this is the new guy.' Then I heard *Heart Full Of Soul* and all those great singles. Once *Over Under Sideways Down* had done its thing, I thought, 'Well, I might as well sell this guitar...' I mean, he was doing outrageous things then. When you think about it, there was nobody doing anything like that: that fuzzbox thing and the single-string stuff. He was special – a ferocious player."

1. Bernie Marsden, who became both a fan and a friend of Jeff Beck over time

2. Jeff Beck with the other members of the Jeff Beck Group around the time of his seminal *Truth* album

"He was doing outrageous things [with The Yardbirds]... nobody was doing anything like that. He was special – a ferocious player"

Clapton and others were very pure disciples of the blues, but Jeff had a different energy.

"He came from that sort of rockabilly thing. That was his thing and he loved Les Paul. But Cliff Gallup was his main hero with Gene Vincent's band, really. He never stopped loving that kind of thing and he'd talk about that for hours. You couldn't talk to him about Les Pauls, but you could talk to him about Gene Vincent."

When did you first meet him?

"I first met him at a gig I did. Actually, I didn't meet him directly that day, but my band opened up for him in '68 and that was with Rod Stewart in the Jeff Beck Group. Luckily enough, I have a poster of that in my music room. The first time I properly met him was in 1974 with Cozy Powell when he came to one of our gigs. Cozy just said, 'A mate of mine's coming to the gig tonight.' And then about half an hour before the show, Jeff Beck swanned into the dressing room in Purley – I was a complete wreck! That was the day that he played the 'Beast'. He played *Scatterbrain* on it through my little Fender Champ. It was mesmerising."

What was he like, behind the volatile persona?

"Well, he was great. He was really funny, you know, because he had

PHOTO BY BLICK/RDB/ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES

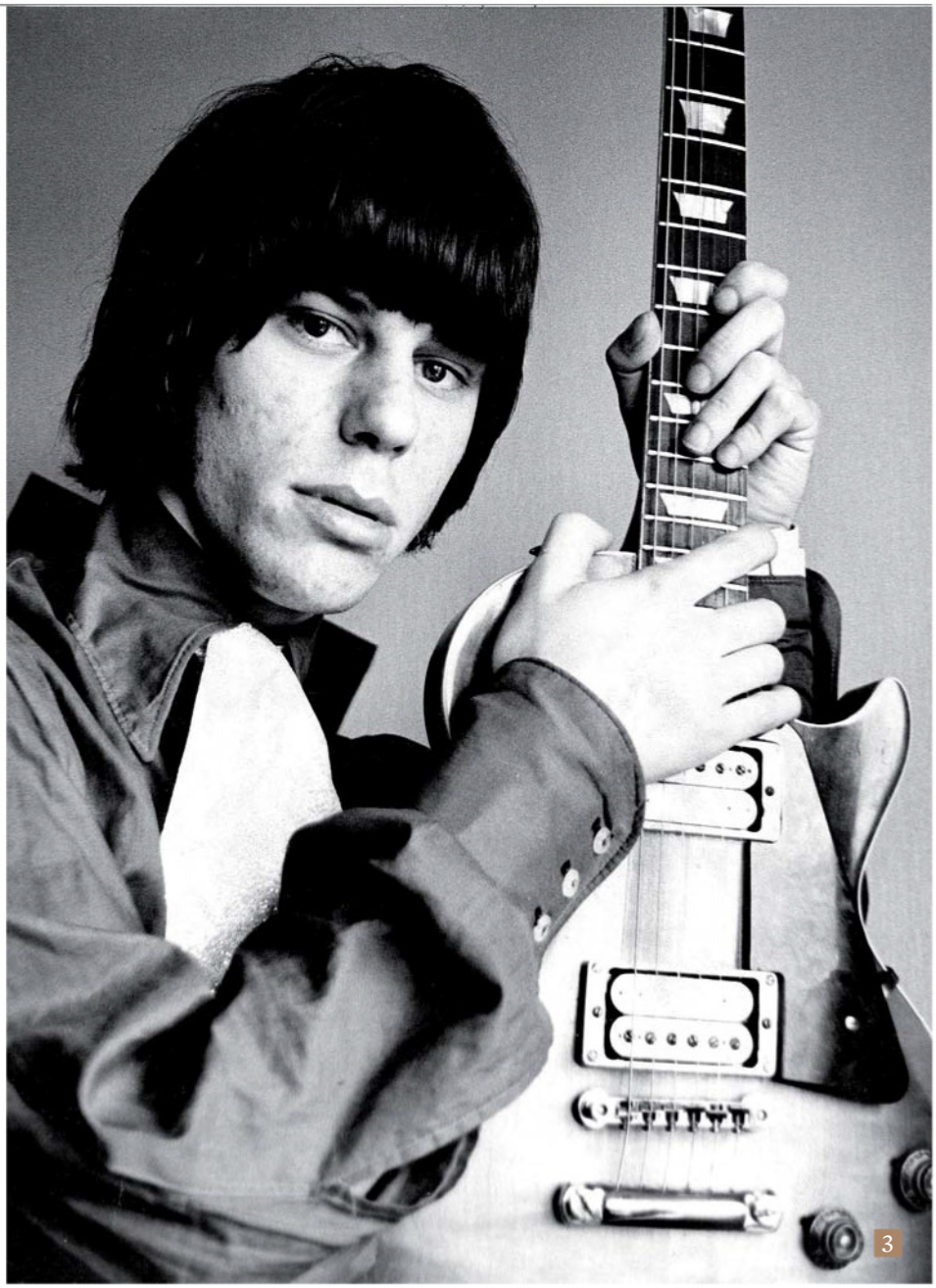


PHOTO BY VAL WILMER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

this reputation as being difficult. But the great bonus was that Cozy had obviously played with him in a band, so they were close – they were really close. He'd always say, 'Nah, Jeff's great...' I mean, my overriding memory of Jeff – apart from being a genius guitar player – was his sense of humour. He was very funny, very quick, and he would do stuff that was just unexpected. Maybe I was lucky and I was on the right side of him; we got on really well.

"He did stuff that nobody ever saw, you know? It was very gratifying because you read about these traumas and prima donna things, and you'd think, 'Hey, he's not like that.' He might be like it with a promoter or somebody who'd upset him at a gig or something. But one to one, in a situation where he came to see Cozy, he was great. He was funny and a great joke-teller, which you might not think about Jeff Beck because his image was not really like that – but he was always a pleasure to be around. He gave his time really generously, once you were part of that inner circle."

"My overriding memory of Jeff – apart from being a genius guitar player – was his sense of humour. He was a pleasure to be around"

3. Jeff with one of his earliest Les Pauls, a 1959 model with a black scratchplate, which was later seriously damaged while on tour (see page 68)

Jeff was best known for playing Strats, but he did incredible work with Les Pauls, Esquires and so on. Which did you think suited him best?

"Well, because Jeff was ever evolving, I think whatever he picked up sounded fantastic. I personally loved what he did in the *Truth* period [1968] with his Les Paul and the Marshalls. But there again, that's what everybody was doing at the time. So for him to jettison that and then go to the Stratocaster... and you can never forget when he picked up that old Esquire of his, which was magical. He had me in tears a few nights from just playing *Over The Rainbow*, you know? You suddenly realise that you're flooded with tears, rolling down your face... I remember him playing a particularly exquisite version of *Over The Rainbow* in Birmingham or maybe Manchester one night. He was not a man that you could give compliments to – he knew how good he was. You just wanted to say, 'Jeff, that was *fantastic* tonight...' but he'd look at me and go, 'Bit messy.' You couldn't argue because if that's what he thought, that's his right, you know? But if that was messy, oh to be able to play like a mess!"

What, as a fellow guitarist, did you take away from seeing him perform at close quarters over the years?

"I think he was so inspirational and yet I knew that I could never go anywhere close to what he did. Warren Haynes, who's a pal of mine, said he didn't listen to Jeff that much for fear of trying to imitate him. I know exactly what he means. Because when I was 20ft away from Jeff on the side of the stage watching or in the audience, I would never be intimidated by him because he was so good, so on his own, and so original."

OUT OF THIS WORLD

Guitarist's senior music editor, Jason Sidwell, shares an unpublished interview with Steve Lukather that was recorded in the early Noughties – where Lukather praises Jeff Beck's untouchable, "alien" approach to the guitar

We heard a story that John McLaughlin, you and Jeff Beck were all recording on David Gilmour's boat in London. You were producing Jeff at this point [for an unreleased album]. What happened to the tapes?
"What happened back then was John had written a piece for the three of us to play, but it ultimately didn't work out. Jeff's just trying to find his way and I was trying to help him as we're friends – he's my favourite guitar player in the whole world. I volunteered to help him and we checked out a whole bunch of stuff. Some of the stuff we did on Gilmour's boat was pretty amazing; I was surprised he never wanted the stuff to come out. But he got into this techno thing so I respect him for that. I'm sorry it didn't work out as I thought we did some pretty cool stuff."

Didn't he record a version of *Chariots Of Fire* with Nile Rodgers?
"Jeff has more material in the can than he does have out, that's for sure."

That would make a good boxset sometime in the future!
"I wouldn't count on it. He's really funny about that – once he's changed his mind to not release something he doesn't want anyone to hear it. I've fond memories of what we did, even though it's not come out."

Do you find that you pick more with fingers these days after working with Jeff?
"Yes, most definitely. He's been a tremendous influence on me as a player, and being able to hang with him, sitting around in a room and jamming with him like I did,

1. Steve Lukather referred to Jeff Beck as his "favourite guitar player in the whole world"

2. Beck's skill went beyond theatrics – he was always seeking to better his playing and experience on guitar

I clocked a lot of stuff that he does. Then again, he never does the same thing twice. He's not one of these guys that does licks, but he's alien – like, whatever the weirdest approach you can take to play the guitar, he does it. There was a Tony Hymas tune and the whole thing was false harmonics, except they don't always lie well, right? So he was bending up the wang bar perfectly in tune, hitting the harmonic and letting it down. He was doing it seamlessly, you couldn't even tell if you weren't looking. He just doesn't play the guitar like anybody else [laughs]."

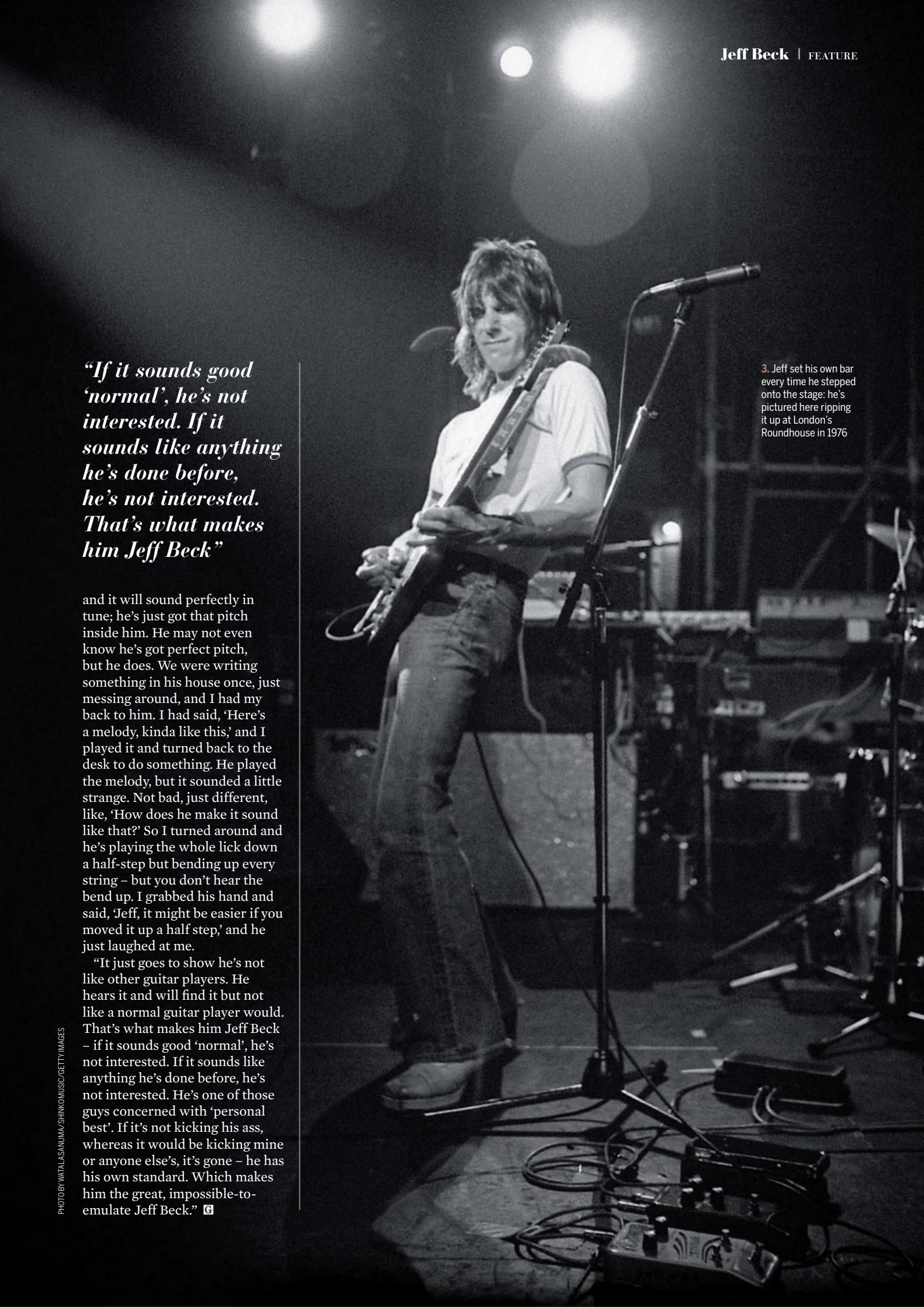
"He can pick up anything and it will sound perfectly in tune; he's just got that pitch inside him… He's not like other guitar players"

PHOTO BY CLAYTON CALL/REDFERNS

There's the world of Allan Holdsworth and then there's the world of Jeff Beck.
"Yeah, he's an alien. It's wonderful, he should just keep following his thing whatever he wants. I'm a fan."

The really great guys do sound unique, though – you give a guitar to, say, Jeff, Eddie Van Halen or you and everyone will sound different.
"Well, that's the funniest thing in the world. I've played Jeff's guitar and with his band, Eddie's guitar and so on just to see. And I sound like myself, although playing through their gear you find yourself playing their licks! Some of Jeff's guitars are set up so strangely, though, that only he can play them."

You mean, such as really high action? And thick-gauge strings?
"Just interesting ways that he does things. He can pick up anything



"If it sounds good 'normal', he's not interested. If it sounds like anything he's done before, he's not interested. That's what makes him Jeff Beck"

and it will sound perfectly in tune; he's just got that pitch inside him. He may not even know he's got perfect pitch, but he does. We were writing something in his house once, just messing around, and I had my back to him. I had said, 'Here's a melody, kinda like this,' and I played it and turned back to the desk to do something. He played the melody, but it sounded a little strange. Not bad, just different, like, 'How does he make it sound like that?' So I turned around and he's playing the whole lick down a half-step but bending up every string – but you don't hear the bend up. I grabbed his hand and said, 'Jeff, it might be easier if you moved it up a half step,' and he just laughed at me.

"It just goes to show he's not like other guitar players. He hears it and will find it but not like a normal guitar player would. That's what makes him Jeff Beck – if it sounds good 'normal', he's not interested. If it sounds like anything he's done before, he's not interested. He's one of those guys concerned with 'personal best'. If it's not kicking his ass, whereas it would be kicking mine or anyone else's, it's gone – he has his own standard. Which makes him the great, impossible-to-emulate Jeff Beck." G

3. Jeff set his own bar every time he stepped onto the stage: he's pictured here ripping it up at London's Roundhouse in 1976

PHOTO BY WATALASANUMA/SHINKOMUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

BECK ON BECK

Jeff Beck's playing was unforgettable and unique. Who better than Jeff himself, then, to explain how his approach to guitar evolved? We open the archives to revisit Jeff explaining his art, in his own words, in classic interviews

Words Jamie Crompton, David West, Jamie Dickson

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

HIS FIRST GUITAR

(Guitarist, Summer 2009)

"My first experience with a guitar was as a kid when I was at a friend's house who was slightly spoiled, he had a record player, a tape recorder, a guitar – all the toys. He'd got bored with the guitar and it only had a couple of strings on it. I started playing around with it and he said, 'Do you wanna borrow it?' I said, 'Yes, please!' I remember carrying it home in the rain and taking my coat off to wrap around it to protect it. Right then, I felt a kind of protective thing towards the guitar. I didn't have any strings so I used some model aeroplane control line wire, the kind that made the model fly round in circles. The people next-door-but-one had a zither and that was actually the first stringed instrument that I touched."

PLAYING A STRAT FOR THE FIRST TIME

(Guitarist, Summer 2009)

"Well, me and a friend got a train and a bus up to London from Croydon and we asked a porter where all the guitars were. He happened to know and said Charing Cross Road, so we jumped on a bus, ran upstairs and looked out the window for guitar stores. My mate suddenly said, 'Oh my God!' We belted down the stairs, stumbling over one another, ran in front of all the traffic and there we found a Tele and a Strat in the window of Jennings Musical Instruments [the original Vox Amplifier Shop, at 100 Charing Cross Road]. We stood there motionless, salivating, for at least five minutes and my mate said, 'Shall we go in?' I said, 'No, no, we can't go in!' We were completely freaked out.

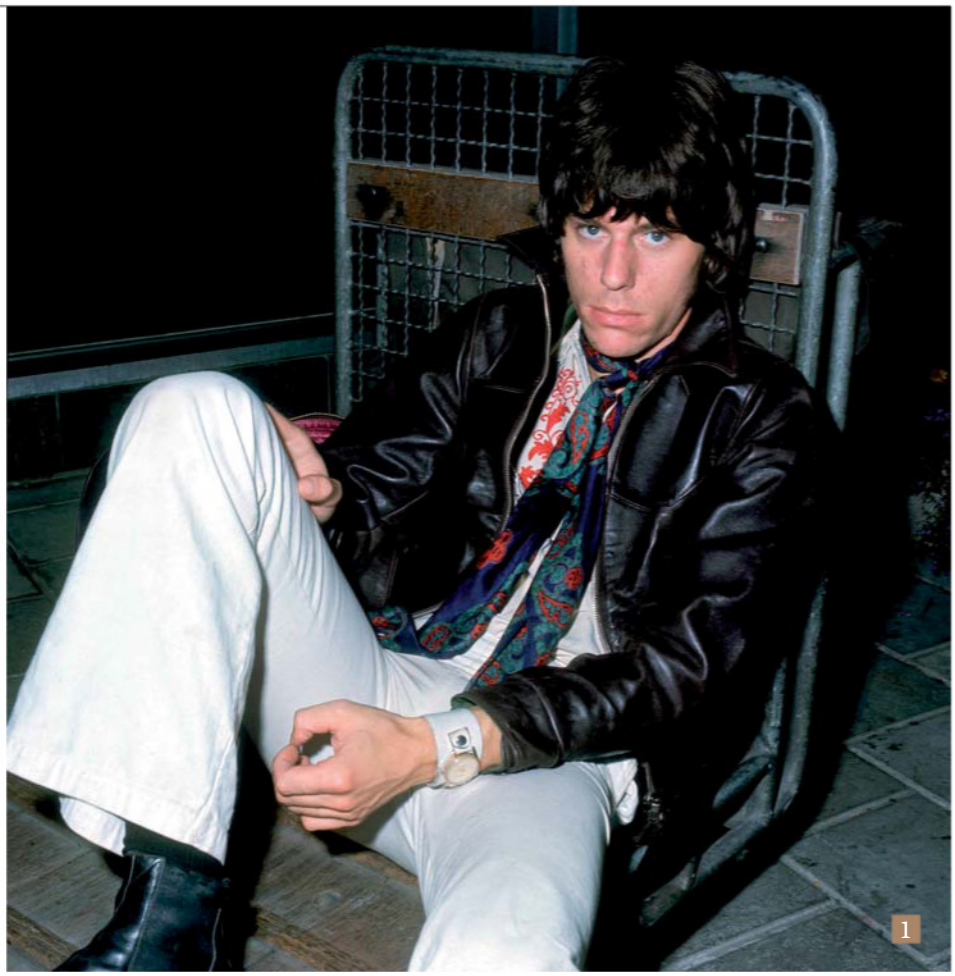


PHOTO BY KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

1. Jeff Beck in 1967, shortly after his departure from The Yardbirds

"After a while we went in and I said, 'I'd like to try the Fender Stratocaster, please,' and the guy said, 'Yes, gentlemen, certainly sir. You are intending to buy it, are you?' We didn't have a pot to piss in, but we said, 'Yeah, yeah...' I played it for a while and it was a totally magical experience. Then I put my muddy boot up on an amp and the guy said, 'Right, get out!' I was happy that I'd played the Strat and didn't care about being thrown out of the store.

"The next time I went back, the guy says, 'Hmm, I remember you...' I started playing some Chet Atkins on the Strat and people started coming in off the street to listen. The guy says, 'Keep playing, keep playing!' I thought, 'You bastard! I'm getting all your bloody customers for you, I'll put my foot on your amp all day long!'

"The place always smelled of pipe smoke and the sales guys were very intimidating. Another shop in Charing Cross Road we used to bug was called Lew Davis. There we discovered a slap-back echo device and we were in heaven. We made friends with a sales guy who used to let us play any guitar in the shop. He was great, he'd leave us alone and say, 'Just don't nick anything!' We never did and they couldn't get rid of us. Then some 15-year-old kid would come in and his dad would buy him a Strat outright for cash. Case and all! Strap, strings, pick... We'd sit there scowling."

GOING SOLO AFTER THE YARDBIRDS

(Guitarist, Summer 2009)

"I enjoy talking about these times, they're still fresh in my head. They were wonderful times and, unfortunately, they didn't last for us because The Yardbirds depended more heavily on guitar than they knew until I walked out, or was thrown out. I was a bit upset about the non-stop touring and the package tours without any real reward. I hardly saw any money and then I got really ill and thought, 'Why am I doing this for 60 bucks a week?' We'd had three chart successes in England and I thought, 'What's going on?' I ate bad fish in France and got food poisoning. I was sick for four days in this hotel and the rest of the band left me to go night-clubbing in St Tropez.

"My head hurt so much I couldn't even move it on the pillow. When it eventually subsided someone put me on a plane back to England and I don't even know how I got home. I wanted the band to call me, but they'd gone to Australia without me.

"My Strat is another arm, it's part of me. It doesn't feel like a guitar at all... It's a tool of great inspiration and torture"

"I just went to ground. A fan found out where I lived and he pretty much saved my life. It was the lowest point in my career. I was on special painkillers and this fan saw my Corvette outside, knocked on my door and said, 'You can't drive, you're too ill.' I said, 'Who the hell are you?' He showed me a newspaper report that the band had gone on tour and said, 'You've got to get the bus,' and he took care of me. I got thrown out of my lodgings, went back home and my mum said, 'Get out, we don't want you here, either!' How much worse could it get? Then finally things started to turn around and I started getting some success in my own name. I had a couple of hits in 1967 with *Hi Ho Silver Lining* and *Tallyman*."

RELYING ON GUITAR ALONE

(Total Guitar, September 2016)

"It's so difficult because I didn't sing. Eric [Clapton] said, and it was words of great wisdom, 'Get used to the fact that you hate your voice because I did.' And I went, 'But you sound good, I sound unbearably bad. I loathe it.' I would never enjoy it even if we had another single like *[Hi Ho] Silver Lining*, I just couldn't bear it. He said, 'I'm telling you, if you don't, it's going to be tough.' And it was tough, but then I can turn around and say, '*Blow By Blow*, put that in your pipe and smoke it, mate.' But he's right, if I did come up with a song and everybody loved it, it would instil confidence automatically and I might even get to like what I sound like, but letting that out there is more than I can bear. It's just not me. I listen

to Jimi who had a peculiar voice and it wasn't a great voice, but it was just magic. He never did scream, it was always the guitar that screamed for him and I still marvel at him even today.

"I never listened to more Jimi than I do now because I've got some really rare recordings, it's just humiliating to know that he was doing that up to 1970, all in a period of about three and a half years. Things took a funny turn in the early 70s. It all turned out well when I heard John McLaughlin because his performance on the Miles Davis *Jack Johnson* album and with Mahavishnu Orchestra said, 'Here's where you can go.' And every musician I knew was raving about them. I thought, 'This is a little bit of me, this. I'll have some of that.' The mastery of the playing, it was unequalled."

ON REINVENTING HIMSELF

(Total Guitar, September 2016)

"I think it's good to do that and it's been easy because if you have a massive hit, where are you going to go? You'll make the worst step ever and slip over, but not having any big hits – and I mean giant hits – it makes it a lot easier to just jump into another genre because you're not cheating somebody out of something they like. I'm an experimenter. It's rich because every album I've done, except for a couple of techno-y records, is different."

ON THE NATURE OF STRATS

(Total Guitar, September 2016)

"My Strat is another arm, it's part of me. It doesn't feel like a guitar at all. It's an implement which is my voice. A Les Paul feels like a guitar and I play differently on that and I sound too much like someone else. With the Strat, instantly it becomes mine so that's why I've welded myself to that. Or it's welded itself to me, one or the other.

"Really you've got to hand it to the Fender Strat because there are songs in [that guitar]. It's a tool of great inspiration and torture at the same time because it's forever sitting there challenging you to find something else in it, but it is there if you really search. It does respond to touch and the tonal variation is unlimited, really, especially with the whammy bar. I have it set up so it becomes almost like a pedal steel."

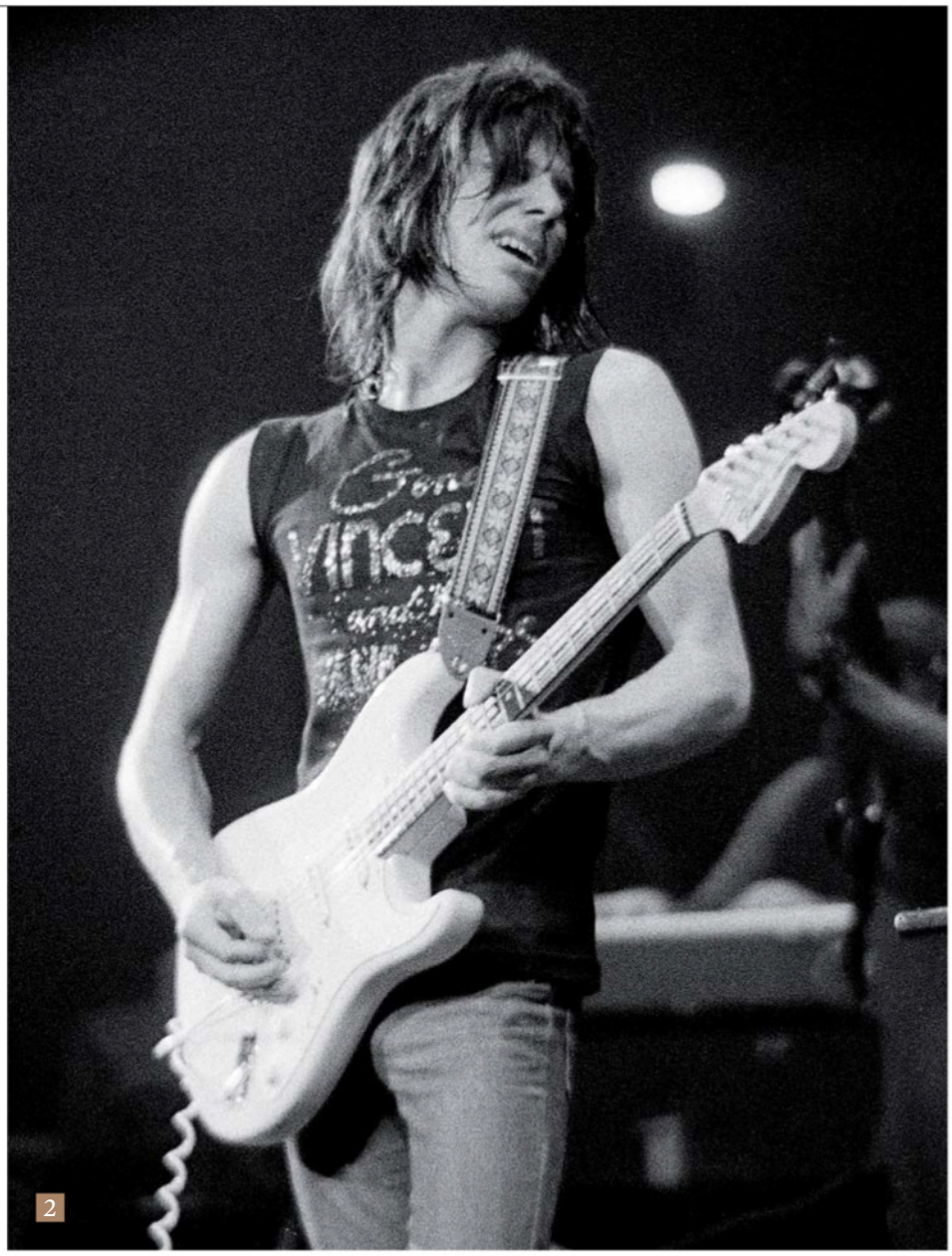


PHOTO BY FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

WHAT BEING A MUSICIAN MEANS

(Guitarist, Summer 2009)

"It probably didn't actually cross my mind until a few years ago when I realised that all the things I hated, such as the touring and the long bus journeys, once you come to terms with the fact that this is what you have to do and then start enjoying it, then it's not a problem. I go 600 miles on a bus now, whereas in the past I would refuse to go six miles without screaming about it. It's better than flying and we have a lot of fun. There's all the thorny edginess of a soap opera wrapped up in a tour, but it's part of life and you're enjoying life in a kind of private bubble. Everyone has their jokes, their humour, their problems and it's great. It's a whole life in a bus. You get to be a gypsy for three months and feel like you're exempt from any outside responsibilities. I would never have believed it, but I've just started to take a laptop on the road to keep in touch with home via the internet! Being a musician means everything to me." G

"I think it's good to [reinvent yourself]… I'm an experimenter. It's rich because every album I've done is different"

2. Beck performs live on stage at the Roundhouse in London in 1972. The Strat was to become an "unlimited" tool

I am music

I live through your moments
Your first shake of the rattle
Your recorder lesson
Your match day anthem
Your queueing anticipation
Your hands in the air
Your main stage mayhem
Your favourite movie scene
Your first dance
Your last night of the proms
Your family singalong
Your swan song.

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THE GUITARS

Jeff Beck was a Strat man through and through, but this wasn't to the avoidance of all other models. Author and guitar historian Tony Bacon recounts his past conversations with Beck as he charts the various six-strings that were instrumental in his career

Think of Jeff Beck, guitar in hand, and you might well think Strat. Not a surprise, given that was his main instrument for the last 40 or so years of his long career. We talked about this as Jeff and I sat in the kitchen of his 16th century Sussex pile enjoying a nice cup of tea and a chat about guitars, one of his favourite subjects.

He reflected on the timeless qualities of a Strat. "You don't get kids saying, 'What's that old guitar? Ain't you got a new one?' It still looks futuristic," he said, smiling at the idea, "and it's still an unbeatable shape, as is the Tele. I don't think you can improve on those two guitars – the all-time great rock guitars."

In fact, he added, the Strat was to blame for his early conversion to the power of rock. "The reason I left school was because of that guitar. I mean, that is brain damage when you're a kid of 14 and you see something like that. It's just a piece of equipment that I dreamed about touching, never mind owning. The first day I stood staring at one in a London shop, I just went into a trance – and I got the wrong bus home, just dreaming about it. You know? It blew my brains apart, and it's never been any different since. It's taken me all round the world and given me everything I've got – just that Strat, really. So it is a particular favourite of mine."

Beck remained a Strat evangelist, playing a good number of the things through the years. And this continuing allegiance must have helped Fender shift countless units, too, especially after his signature model was added to the line. At first, he'd vetoed the idea and the original design evolved into Fender's Strat Plus of 1987, but the Jeff Beck Stratocaster, not dissimilar to the Plus, finally appeared four years later.

> *"The reason I left school was because of that [Strat]. The first day I saw one in a London shop, I just went into a trance"* JEFF BECK

And before the Strat? Did you say Telecaster, Esquire, Les Paul? Well, yes – but there was a Strat very early on for the young Geoffrey. As he weaved in and out of teenage bands, one of his earliest electrics was a Strat, back in 1961 or so. "It was a '60 sunburst, which I painted pink or lavender," he recalled. "I remember it split in two – this big split appeared along the back of it because I'd whacked something with it. But I wanted a car and had to sell it. So, as I travelled on the train to sell it, I touched up the split with my girlfriend's nail varnish. It matched perfectly! Fantastic story, eh? And they never spotted it."

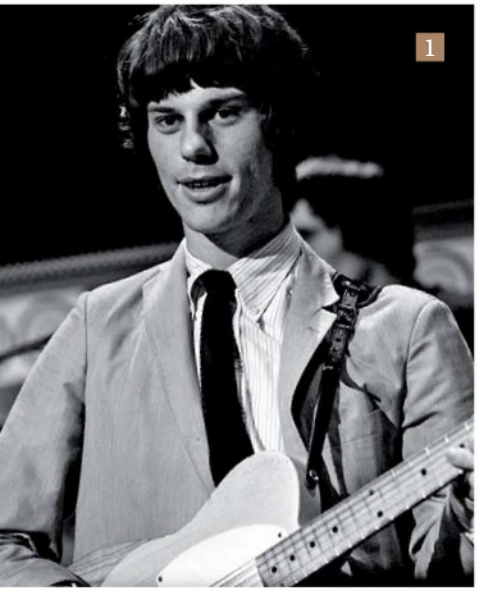
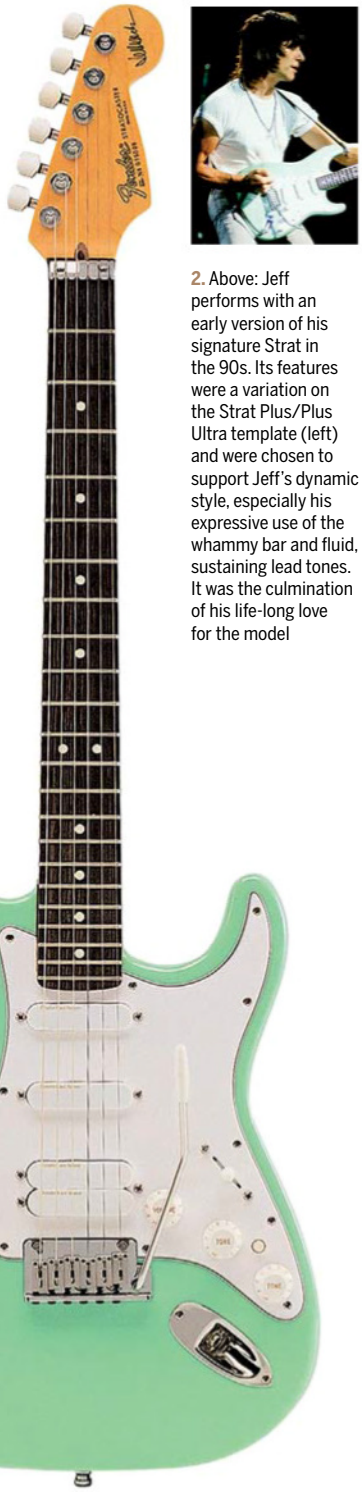


PHOTO BY STANLEY BIELECKI/ASP/GETTY IMAGES

1. Jeff in rehearsals with The Yardbirds for TV show *Ready Steady Go!* in 1965, playing a Fender Esquire with a modded body. It was purchased that year from John Walker of The Walker Brothers for £75, according to Jeff



2. Above: Jeff performs with an early version of his signature Strat in the 90s. Its features were a variation on the Strat Plus/Plus Ultra template (left) and were chosen to support Jeff's dynamic style, especially his expressive use of the whammy bar and fluid, sustaining lead tones. It was the culmination of his life-long love for the model

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

"I used to spin the Esquire around on top of the amp and change the speed of the echo while it was feeding back. Total lunacy!" JEFF BECK

THE GUY CAN'T HELP IT

Another Fender seed was planted in 1956, when Jeff went to the local cinema after school to see *The Girl Can't Help It*, which he reckoned was the most pivotal film of his early life. He sat slack-jawed in the Sutton Granada as Little Richard's band performed – and there at the back was a guy playing a lovely battered old Tele. Then on came Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps, and now on the big screen some teenage blonde kid was playing an Esquire. "It was just mouth-watering for us!" he remembered.

Fast forward to 1965, and he found himself playing a red Telecaster, passed on from the outgoing Eric Clapton when Jeff joined The Yardbirds. It was, he remembered, "a terrible guitar", and soon he began looking around for something better. "John Owen, a friend of mine, had a Telecaster. I would ogle this thing, and I spent more time playing it than he did. Then I borrowed it – and I never gave it back."

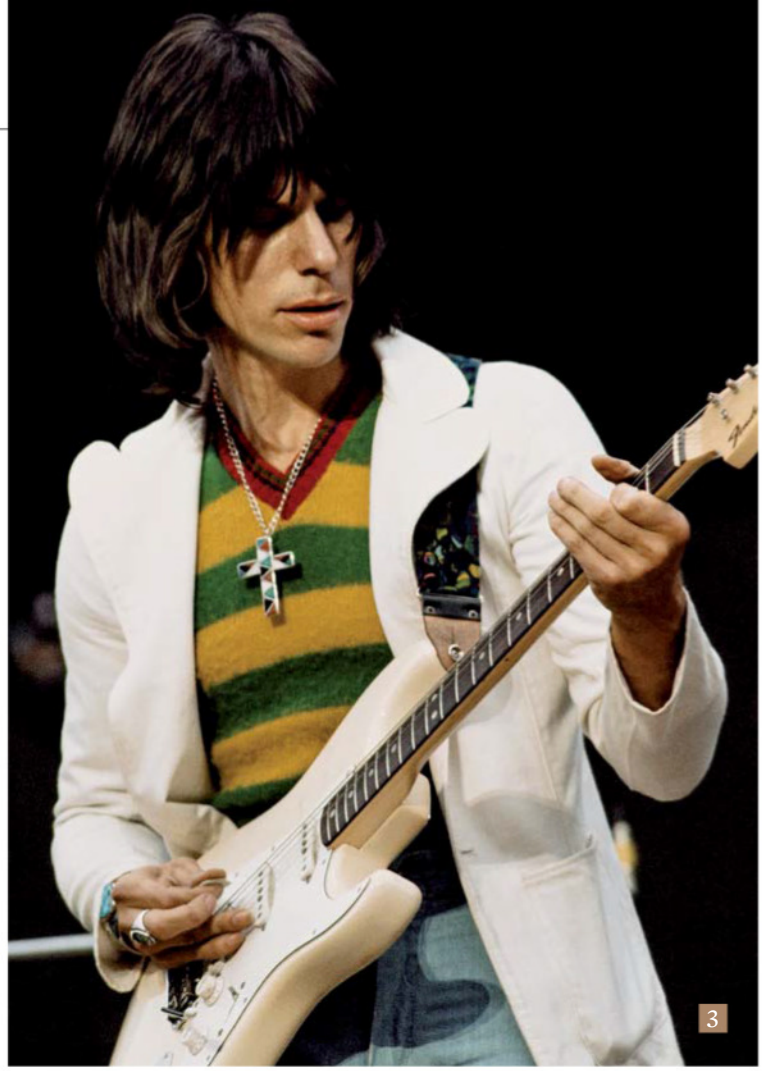


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

3. Jeff performing with hard rock supergroup Beck, Bogert & Appice in London in 1972. The Strat would become his 'home', but many still love his work with a Les Paul

There was more to the Tele now than a memory of Little Richard. "It was because of the sound that Ricky Nelson's records had," he explained. "We all thought that was a Telecaster. We weren't sure because there was no information on the records at all. I don't know who told us, but we all assumed it was a Tele because it sounded so close when we plugged in our one: on the back pickup it sounded a lot like James Burton."

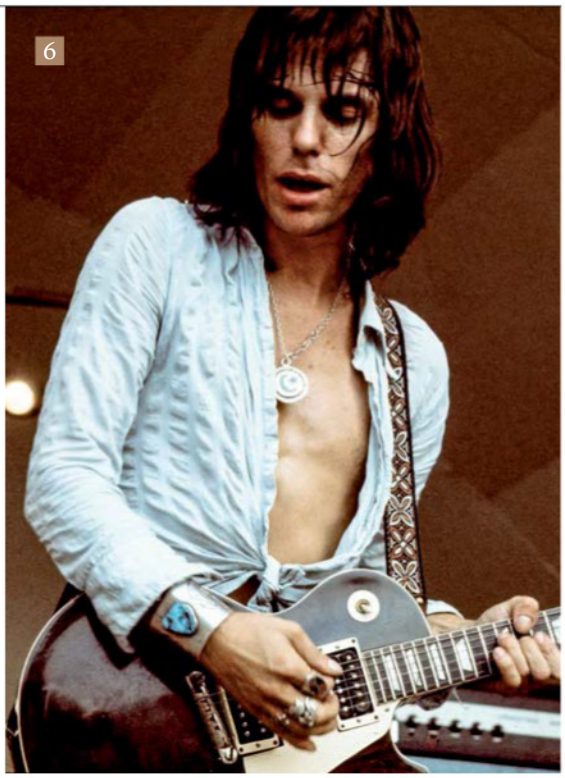
He got an Esquire soon afterwards. "I bought my first one from John Walker. We were doing a package tour with The Walker Brothers in 1965, and the first thing I saw at rehearsals was this really good-looking pair of brothers, and one had an Esquire with a white pickguard and blonde neck. And I wanted the blonde neck! Because you couldn't get that after a certain run – they changed it to rosewood. I said, 'I want that guitar.' He said, 'Oh, 75 quid.' Give over! They're only about 85 quid new! And his had been shaved into a contoured body. I bought it anyway."

The two Fenders served him well during his short stay in The Yardbirds. Many of the studio cuts he made with them have Jeff creating inventive little cameos that still have the power to surprise and delight. Take the remarkable *Shapes Of Things*, for which he used his Esquire at Chess studios in Chicago.

"We were all completely blown away with the way they did things there," he said. "The drum sound was great, and everything was like a dream come true. Marshall Chess was there, and the guys that used to record Muddy Waters. I was standing right next to an AC30

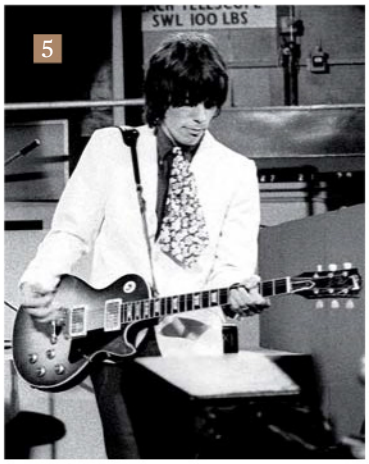
PHOTO BY JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

4. The Yardbirds perform again on *Ready Steady Go!* in 1965 (from left to right): Jim McCarty, Jeff Beck, Keith Relf, Paul Samwell-Smith and Chris Dreja



6. Beck performing at Crystal Palace Bowl, London in 1972 with the famous 'oxblood' Les Paul he converted from a 50s Goldtop

PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES



5. Beck on stage with The Yardbirds in 1966 pictured with '59 Burst with an added black pickguard; it was later damaged and crudely refinished

PHOTO BY JAN OLOFSSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

on a chair, which I used so that I could easily reach the controls. I just moved around to get the right noise, you know? It was madness: pure experimentation. I used to spin the Esquire around on top of the amp and change the speed of the echo while it was feeding back. Total lunacy! I used to try and break it – and I never could."

LESS 'PAUL

Toward the end of The Yardbirds, he began playing a Les Paul, which he remembered as a '59 Burst with an added black pickguard bought in London for about £175. It's on *Jeff's Boogie*, and on tracks such as *Beck's Bolero* on *Truth* – two humbling lessons in exactly how many sounds can be had from one Les Paul, one amplifier, two hands and a unique guitar master.

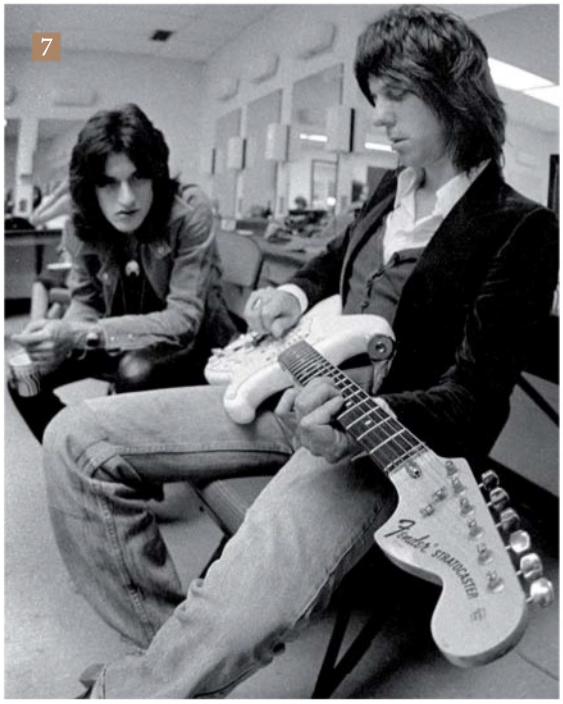
"The Strat responded more to my aggressive playing than the Les Paul, which sounds dreadful if you start hitting it" JEFF BECK

That first Les Paul of Jeff's was soon in the wars, smashed almost fatally during a US tour. Suitably repaired, the guitar continued to serve him for a while, and soon he removed its finish. "I saw a pale guitar in a book," he recalled, "so I stripped off the sunburst to make it look like that. I went to a carpentry shop in Nine Elms [South London] and bought some paint stripper. I'd been a painter in the car business, so I knew what I was doing. I didn't want it to look shiny."

Jeff moved through several more Lesters, including a converted mid-50s Goldtop with a dark-brown refin that Jeff called oxblood. That guitar turned up in a few places on the exquisite jazz-rock album *Blow By Blow*, recorded with George Martin toward the end of 1974. But by then Jeff's loyalty had switched almost entirely to Strats.

"I think it was when we did the *Beck-Ola* album that I got fed up with the sound of the Les Paul," he said. "In the studio, the Les Paul didn't sound a lot different from the John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Lovely sound, but every track ends up sounding very similar. The Strat seemed to respond more to my aggressive playing than the Les Paul, which just sounds dreadful if you start hitting it."

For *Blow By Blow*, he thought the Les Paul ought to be more attuned to jazz-rock. "It was partly because of George Martin that I used it; his ears were having a bit of trouble handling the raucous screaming that I was doing. George would flinch and start walking around and making tea and things. He likes good mellow sounds. So I thought, 'Well, there's no point in making the guy suffer. I may as well play melodically. And then maybe I'll come back one night and scrub over it with the Strat.' Eventually, when I started to do *Freeway Jam* and stuff like that, and I needed to go crazy, I decided the Strat was more my tool, you know?"



7. Aerosmith guitarist, Joe Perry looks on earnestly as Jeff Beck runs through some licks on his Strat backstage in 1976

It certainly was. No doubt you'll have your own favourites from among the many gigs and records Jeff played and made with a Strat since his 70s conversion. For such an inspirational risk-taker, there were inevitable and relatively brief infatuations along the way – a 'Tele-Gib' mash-up here, a Jackson or two there – but Strats remained his main love. Back in the kitchen, meanwhile, with another cuppa lined up, Jeff began to talk about the way electric guitars in the olden days were often misunderstood by people who should have known better.

"I remember some classical guitarist," he recalled, "he's on TV, and he's saying, 'Oh, this electric guitar means nothing. You could have any old shape bit of wood and pickup – they all sound the same.' Complete bollocks. Complete and utter rubbish! To him, they may all sound the same. But we know differently." G

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THAT PICKUP

"I've got a Jeff Beck in my guitar" is something many of us have said over the past nearly five decades. And while the classic Seymour Duncan SH-4 JB was never actually a signature pickup, without Jeff it may never have happened...

Words Dave Burrluck

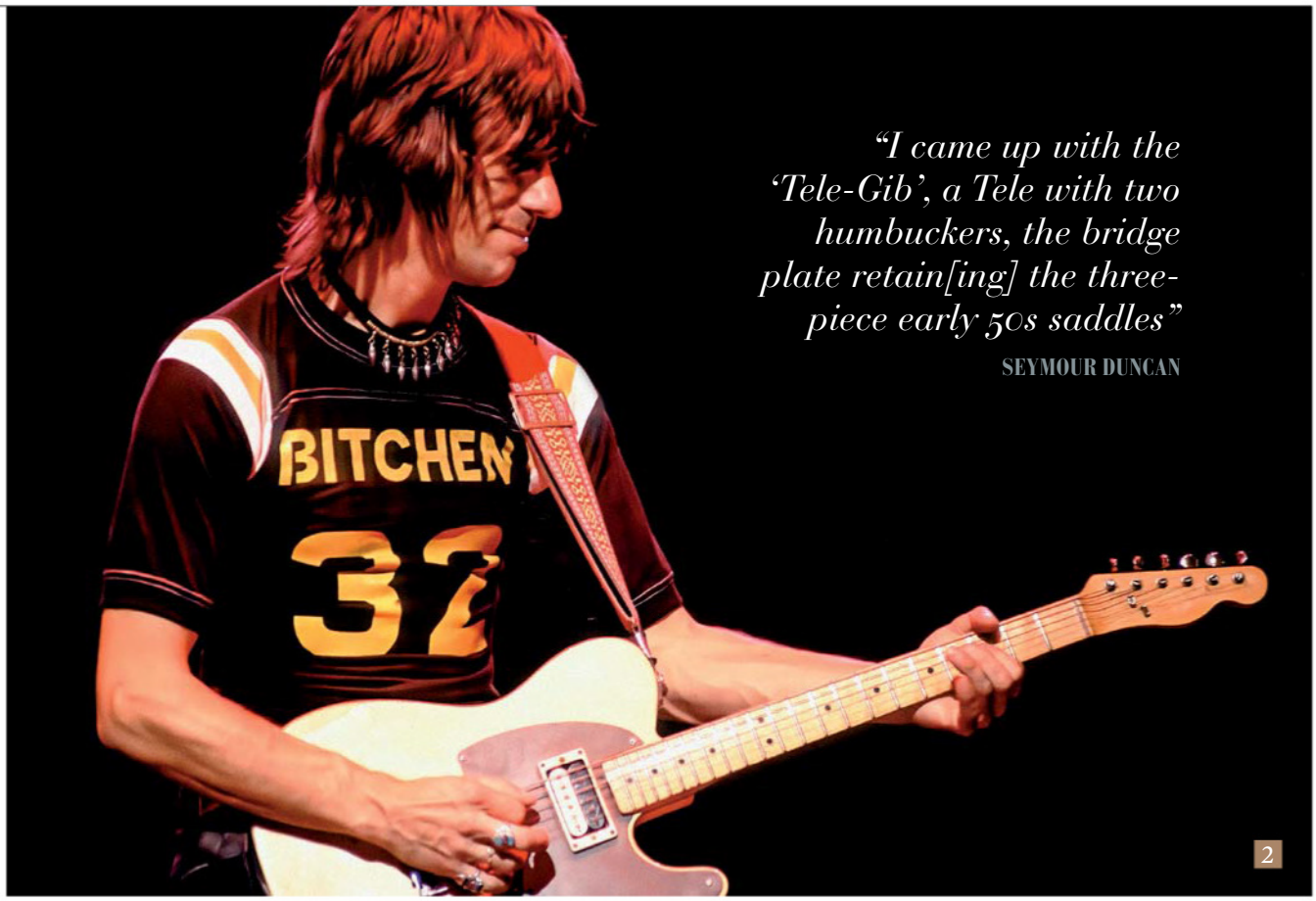
PHOTO BY EDUARDO OLMEDA, COURTESY OF THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME

1

One of the many, many guitarists obsessed with Jeff Beck was a young Seymour Duncan. Here's what he told this writer back in the 90s: "I first heard Jeff Beck in the summer of '65, I was playing in a talent show with a local band. The local radio station played a recording of *Heart Full Of Soul* by The Yardbirds, their second hit. The unique guitar sound was from Jeff Beck. I tracked down many of their recordings and saw them performing on 60s TV shows such as *Hullabaloo*, *Shindig!* and *Ready Steady Go!*.

"I'd noticed Jeff was playing a Fender Telecaster but without the neck pickup," he added, "making it an Esquire [from 1954]. Originally it had a white single-layer scratchplate that Jeff changed to a black phenolic one. He'd bought the guitar for $60 [or £75, according to Jeff! – Ed] from John Maus [aka Walker], guitarist with The Walker Brothers when they toured England in the mid-60s. Years later, John visited my workshop in Santa Barbara and told me he'd contoured the front and back of the body to make it feel more like a Stratocaster."

Continuing the story in *Guitarist* back in 2005, Evan Skopp, a long-time employee of Seymour Duncan, related the tale: "In 1972, the late American country blues guitarist Roy Buchanan passed through Ohio where Seymour had achieved cult status as 'The Midwest's Eric Clapton.' Buchanan told the 20-something Seymour, 'Come with me to England. They're gonna love you there!' Soon, Seymour found himself burning it up in London's bars and clubs by night. By day, he performed guitar repair for Ivor Arbiter at the Fender Soundhouse on London's Tottenham Court



"I came up with the 'Tele-Gib', a Tele with two humbuckers, the bridge plate retain[ing] the three-piece early 50s saddles"
SEYMOUR DUNCAN

2

PHOTO BY PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Road. It was during those days that Seymour struck up a friendship with his guitar hero, Jeff Beck – and had the honour of introducing Jeff to Roy Buchanan."

The story continues that Jeff's favourite Les Paul was sent to be repaired "with a volume control problem", Seymour told us. "[But] when he got the guitar back the pickups had covers on them, and when they were removed the original 'Patent Applied For' pickups had been replaced with new Gibson humbuckers. I felt real bad and wanted to get Jeff a guitar with the tone of a Les Paul. I couldn't afford a Les Paul so I came up with the 'Tele-Gib', a Tele with two humbuckers, the bridge plate cut to take the humbucker but retain the three-piece early 50s saddles. The pickups were '59 Patent Applied For humbuckers that came out of a broken Gibson Flying V that once belonged to Lonnie Mack. Someone had messed with the coils so I rewound them as prototypes for Jeff. He liked [the 'Tele-Gib'], too, and started recording with it in '74 for the *Blow By Blow* album."

Along with calling the guitar the 'Tele-Gib', Seymour nicknamed the bridge pickup 'JB'. Evan explained: "The neck pickup was originally called 'JM' after the hot-rod racer character John Milner in the classic film *American Graffiti* – one of Jeff's then-favourites. A few years later, 'JM' would morph into 'Jazz Model,' which is what it's still called today."

According to both Seymour and Evan, it's the 'Tele-Gib' you hear on Stevie Wonder's *Cause We've Ended As Lovers*, a key track on *Blow By Blow*. "Jeff dedicated it to the man responsible for Seymour coming to England: none-other-than Roy Buchanan," said Evan. Seymour then built another 'Tele-Gib' for himself and wound the second set of JB and JM pickups. Interestingly, Evan told us at the time that both of those 'Tele-Gibs' used 250kohm pots, "which tend to bleed off the pickups' treble response and provide a smoother taper", he explained. Not the usual 500k values used by most of us with humbuckers.

"Many of England's top guitarists sought out Seymour's JB model for their humbucker-equipped guitars [after 'Blow By Blow']" EVAN SKOPP

"Many of England's top guitarists sought out Seymour's JB model for their humbucker-equipped guitars [as a result of the success of *Blow By Blow*]," said Evan. "They found that the JB gave increased output (16.4kohms) without sounding harsh or dark like other high-output pickups of the mid-70s. When Seymour returned to the USA the next year, his reputation as a pickup designer – and the JB's reputation as a remarkable pickup – preceded him."

When Seymour launched his pickup company in 1976, the JB became the SH-4 JB, and nearly 50 years later it remains one of Seymour Duncan's best-selling pickups. Although we've all called it the 'Jeff Beck', officially Seymour Duncan will tell you those letters stand for 'Jazz-Blues'. Despite their friendship, Seymour and Jeff never had any official product endorsement agreement, though Seymour was famously gifted the '54 Esquire that he had obsessed over as a young guitarist.

"A few days after I'd given Jeff the 'Tele-Gib'," said Seymour, "his manager Ralph Baker turned up with three guitars in a cloth bag: 'Jeff wants you to take your pick.' There was a '51 Tele, a mid-50s Strat and – my favourite guitar – Jeff's '54 'Yardbirds' Esquire. That's how I got it!" G

1. The '54 Esquire gifted by Jeff to Seymour Duncan was once part of Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame's Play It Loud exhibit, co-organised with NYC's The Met, and is now back on display at the Rock Hall in Cleveland, Ohio

2. Jeff Beck performs with the 'Tele-Gib', a dual-humbucker Telecaster whose pickups were specially rewound for Beck by Seymour Duncan. The bridge pickup became known as the 'JB' – and today's SH-4 JB remains a bestseller for the company

IN MY LIFE

BRUCE FOXTON

He's the sharp-suited mod who partnered Paul Weller in The Jam and penned the best basslines in punk. Now, as he keeps the classics alive in From The Jam and releases a fantastic new album of originals with Russell Hastings, Bruce Foxton looks back on burying the hatchet, beating tinnitus and why The Beatles can't sue him for the *Start!* bassline...

Words Henry Yates

When You're Young

"Most kids want to be professional footballers or firemen. I just wanted to play music and I thought guitar was a good start – the piano was a bit too big and expensive. My mum and dad, bless them, they saved up their pennies and bought me an acoustic guitar to start the ball rolling. I was a bit clumsy, just dabbling to start with. But if you want to do something good, you've got to do it on a regular basis. And I just went on from there."

Trading Places

"I joined The Jam as rhythm guitarist. They had a lead guitarist in Steve Brookes and Paul [Weller] was on bass. But when Steve left, we auditioned a few players and they either weren't good musically or we'd have found them hard socially. So Paul said, 'Let's try it as a three-piece. You take bass, I'll take rhythm/lead, see how we go.' That's how it finished up. I didn't mind moving to bass. I wanted to perform live, and if that meant changing instruments, I was prepared for it. The only thing is that if you're at a party and someone says, 'Give us a song, Bruce,' piano or guitar is a lot easier than bass. For me, it'd have to be the Formula 1 intro [Fleetwood Mac's *The Chain*] all the time!"

Meeting The Modfather

"I wouldn't say that Paul and I immediately clicked, but he literally didn't want to do anything at all, work-wise, other than be a successful musician, and I thought, 'That sounds good to me.' That's what I wanted, to be in a band that was working. Paul was just very determined and committed. He could be prickly, shall we say, in interviews or whatever – and I didn't envy your job! I think 40 years down the line, he's probably mellowed."

Power Trio

"Sometimes you get three musicians and the standard of their playing is okay, but it's not going to set the world on fire. But when you couple, say, my bass with Rick [Buckler]'s drumming and Paul's guitar, it was just a formula that worked. I couldn't play slap bass. I'm not Mark King or one of those players, although I think there's a couple of twangs here and there on *Absolute Beginners*. Each to their own. Like Stanley Clarke or whatever – I appreciate the quality of his playing, but it wouldn't have suited The Jam, would it?"

In The City

"The working men's clubs of Woking wasn't really our audience, but it was like serving an apprenticeship. We knew it was time to move on when you looked out at the audience – who were pretty old in those days, and they all had their fingers in their ears, the whole venue. So we thought, 'Hmm, they're not really digging this, are they?'

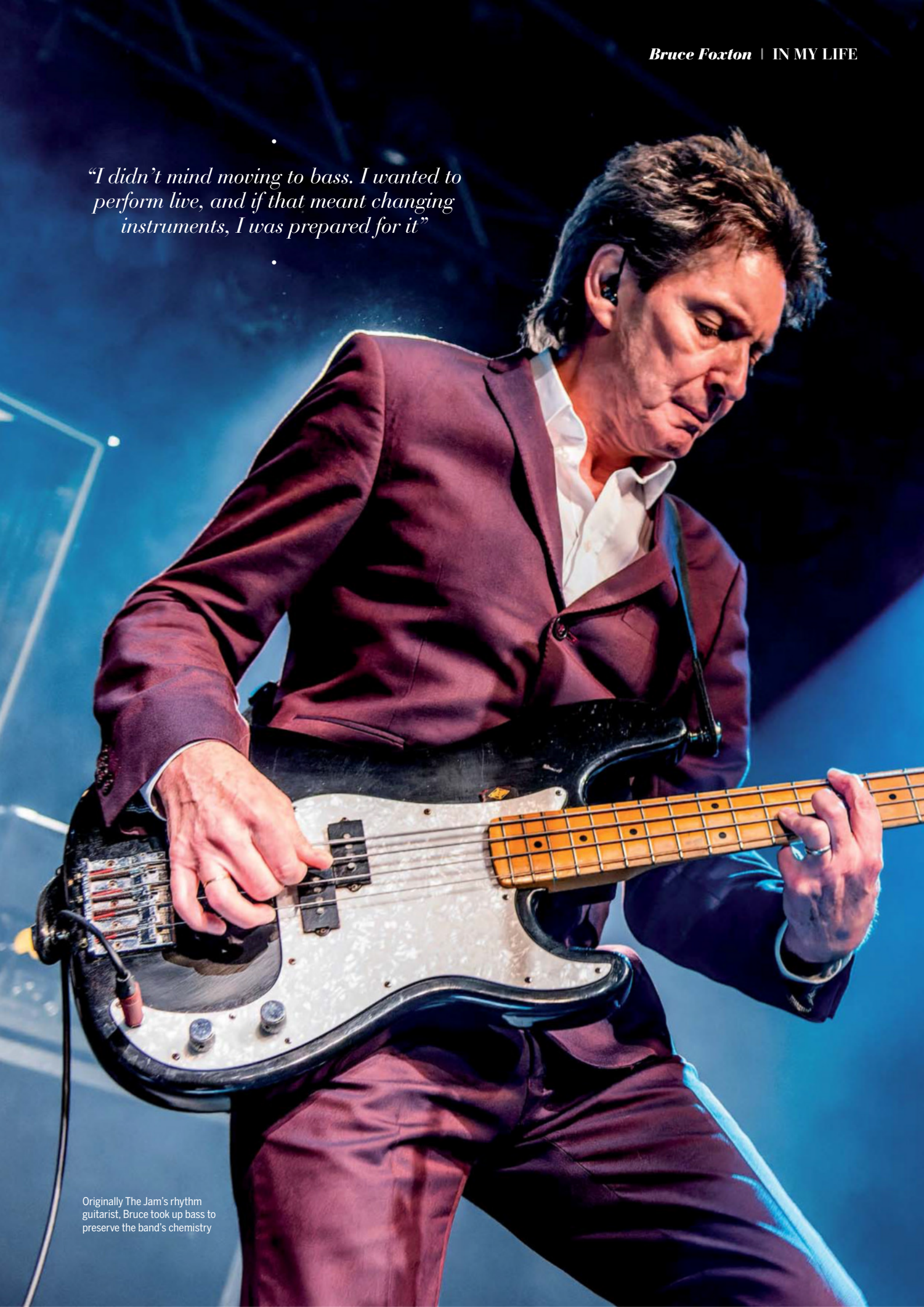
"John Weller [Jam manager and Paul's father], he traipsed everywhere getting work for us, borrowing and begging transport to move our gear around. He put feelers out up in town and we started getting London gigs at The Greyhound, the Red Cow and The Marquee. So we eventually cracked that circuit, which was great. A&R guys wouldn't come out to Woking because they thought it was in the sticks."

Anarchy In The UK

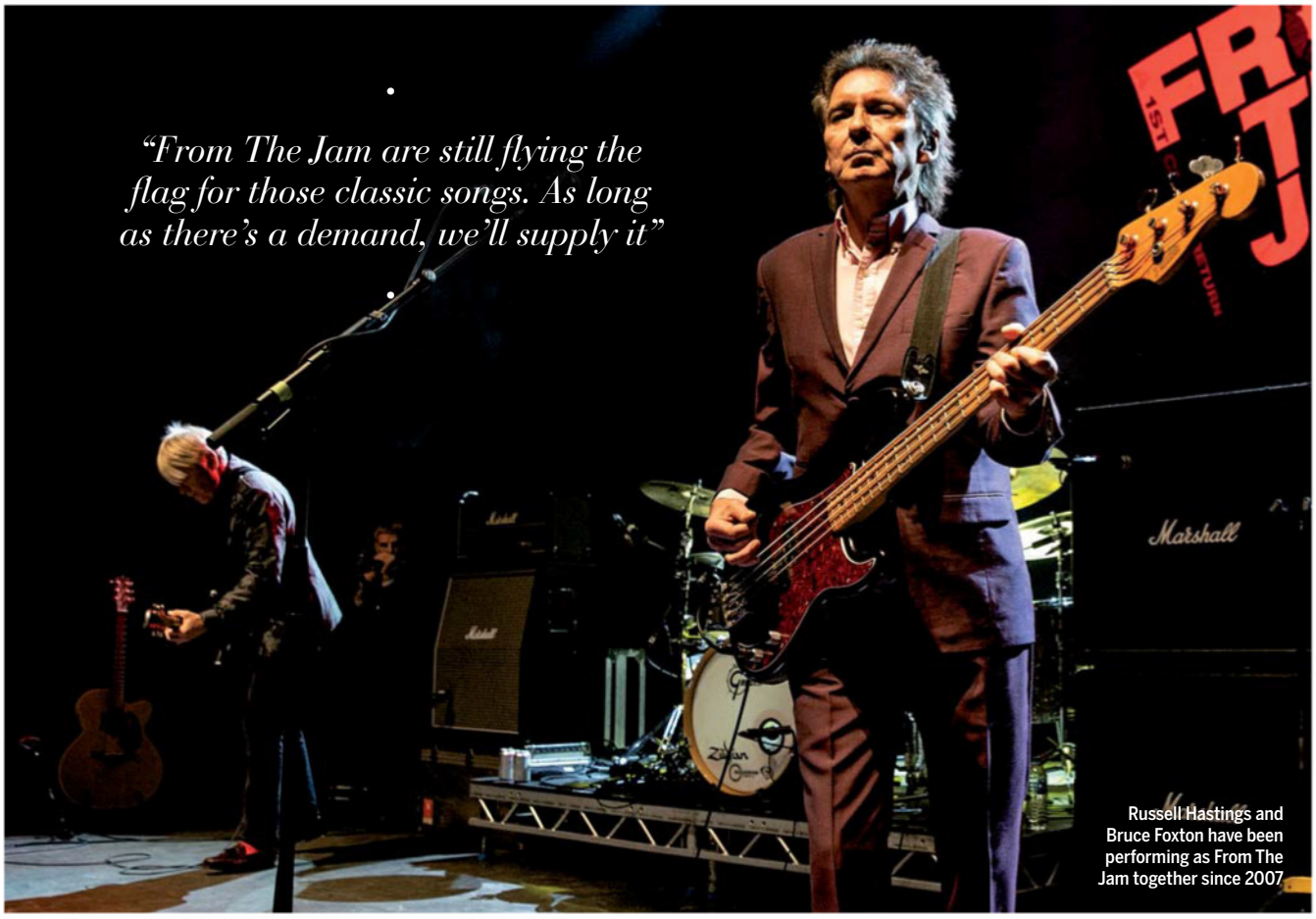
"There wasn't a lot happening in the early 70s that appealed to younger audiences, so when punk came along it was like a breath of fresh air. We were termed as the black sheep of the punk era because we had more going for us musically, and we wore suits, not bondage trousers. The Jam wasn't really a punk band. But those were the old days of pigeonholing bands, weren't they? I've been guilty of it myself to a certain extent."

PHOTO © DEREK D'SOUZA AT WWW.DEREKDSOUZAPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

"I didn't mind moving to bass. I wanted to perform live, and if that meant changing instruments, I was prepared for it"



Originally The Jam's rhythm guitarist, Bruce took up bass to preserve the band's chemistry



"From The Jam are still flying the flag for those classic songs. As long as there's a demand, we'll supply it"

Russell Hastings and Bruce Foxton have been performing as From The Jam together since 2007

PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Jam Sessions

"With my bass influences, I go back to the 60s, John Entwistle and Paul McCartney. Basslines like *Start!* just come to you. It's not an intentional thing. Obviously, people have said that *Start!* sounds like *Taxman*. Well, it's not quite like *Taxman*, note-wise – you couldn't sue me for it. I think that came about because we were in the States at the time and listening to The Beatles' *Revolver* album a lot, so it was probably in my head somewhere and when Paul presented me with *Start!*, it came out. The bassline for *A Town Called Malice* has a Motown vibe, whereas *Down In The Tube Station At Midnight* is quite spaced-out and goes hand in hand with the ominous lyrics. Those basslines were all just in the moment – whatever pours out."

Precision Testing

"I've still got my Rickenbackers from the Jam days. I love the look of a Ricky, and because the neck is so slim on a 4001, my hands could go round it quite well. But it was around about the time of *All Mod Cons* [1978] that I tried a Precision and just loved it. It's just the sound of a P-Bass. It just had that more punchy bottom-end. I found the Ricky quite toppy. In fact, it was sacrilege, but me and my guitar tech once butchered some Rickys, putting in P-Bass pickups to try to make it sound like a Precision. But all it did was screw up a lovely guitar. Probably my favourite P-Bass of all was that one I used on *All Mod Cons*. It was a tough decision to auction that bass in 2009, but I'd enjoyed it and I wanted someone else to enjoy it – and I got a few bob for it."

Writer Blocked

"George Harrison got the hump when he left The Beatles because he said he had so many good songs that Paul and John didn't want to know about. But I'm not comparing myself with George Harrison! *News Of The World* and *Smithers-Jones* are probably my finest moments in terms of having a go at songwriting in The Jam. I didn't find it that easy, and some of the tracks that did actually make it onto vinyl, I don't really think they warrant being there."

End Of The Road

"The Jam splitting up in 1982 was a big deal. It was a very emotional time. Paul called a meeting and said he was leaving the band. Of course, we were taken aback. It was devastating at the time. It was like going out with your girlfriend for a long while and then she ditches you. I couldn't believe it. And the farewell shows we did in London, they were hard. We were at the top of our game. Members of the public would come up in tears and say to me, 'Why are you splitting up?' And it was like, 'Well, I don't know, exactly.' Paul never really gave a reason. I thought we had more in us to give, but he'd made his mind up and we had to respect that and move on."

Freak Out

"The record company were chuffed with the success of my first solo single *Freak* [1983], but they gave me another couple of singles and they didn't do so well, so they dumped me, basically. When we were talking contracts, they said, 'We see you as a longterm project, it's not just a cash-in job.' But it turned out to be that, really. They just milked what interest I might have to the public, and when that waned, they just said goodbye."

Stiff Drinks

"Joining Stiff Little Fingers in 1990 was pretty testing because Ali McMordie is a good player. But when Jake Burns told me Ali had moved on, I jumped at

Ruling the stage with Rickys: Paul Weller and Bruce live in New York, 1978

"We were termed as the black sheep of the punk era because we had more going for us musically, and we wore suits, not bondage trousers"

PHOTO BY DAVID TAN/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

the chance. It was different to The Jam. There was a bit more punk in them, I suppose. I loved the songs and I knew Jake really well as a friend anyway. And I wasn't doing a lot. I was dabbling with other bands, trying to make something of a career, just beavering away in the background. It was 15 years of great times – and lots of drinking. But it was a good decision to move on in 2004 and do the Casbah Club. I think we'd exhausted Fingers between us. Otherwise it might have killed me because I was drinking far too much."

We're Jamming

"From The Jam are still flying the flag for those classic songs. There's a wealth of material and I think it should still be heard, and the audiences all seem to have an amazing time when they come along. So that's the mission with this band, just to enjoy it. As long as there's a demand there, we'll supply it."

•

"Russell Hastings and I didn't have any set direction in our heads [for 'The Butterfly Effect']. The main criteria was melody"

•

Foxton & Hastings' *The Butterfly Effect* is a collection of new songs from the longtime duo

PHOTO BY LORNE THOMSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Friends Reunited

"Guesting on Paul's 2010 album *Wake Up The Nation* and appearing with him on stage at the Royal Albert Hall, that meant a lot. My first wife was seriously ill and having treatment in Tel Aviv because it was top-notch at the time. Paul called us while we were out there. He'd heard what was happening through a mutual friend and he was just wishing us lots of love. That just meant so much to me. Whatever we fell out about all those years ago was just pathetic compared to real, proper issues. It put it all in perspective."

Boom Boxes

"I've used Ashdown or Marshall amps for years. Ampeg did us proud for a while; I found they were great when they worked. But Casbah Club were on a support tour to The Who in Europe and Pino Palladino was using SVTs – and his blew up on one occasion, so he had to borrow mine!"

Having A Flutter

"I'm exceptionally pleased with *The Butterfly Effect*, my new album with Russell Hastings. We didn't have any set direction in our heads. It was like a raffle – we just stuck our hands into the box and come out with those tracks. The main criteria, if there was any, was melody. We had to work around Covid, so the bulk of the album was done on iPhones. Russell would call up and say, 'I've got this idea for a song,' and he'd 'la' [sing] it to me. Then I'd put down a guide bass, send it back to him.

"We had do a Covid test every time we went in the studio, which wasn't really conducive to writing. But the shackles were off and we enjoyed the whole process. It's important to show that we're not just stuck in that Jam period, that we're also moving forward with new material. We haven't stagnated, put it that way."

Sound Affects

"I'd advise your readers to use in-ear monitors from the start because it takes its toll. I've been in the music industry 40-odd years, and a lot of that time was done without in-ears. It was just very loud monitors on stage firing up at me and, consequently, I suffered. Like quite a few musicians, I've now got hearing aids and if I'd taken more of a precaution all those years ago, I'd still have good hearing now. But that's the price I paid for it. Eventually, I had to make a decision. If I'd just carried on at the volume we were at with the wedges, I'd probably have lost my hearing completely by now."

Bruce Almighty

"It was very flattering and nice when *NME* readers voted me the No 7 most influential bass player in the world. It's nice to be thought of like that. I don't quite understand it because I consider what I do quite easy and anybody could do it. But obviously not! My main hope for the future now is good health. I've had a scare with a lymph node being cancerous, but so far, so good, and I'm having immunotherapy treatment. So my ambition is just to stay healthy, more than the music." G

The Butterfly Effect from Bruce Foxton and Russell Hastings is out now on Absolute
www.brucefoxton.com

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DJANGO'S LEGACY

ENIGMATIC **GYPSY KING DJANGO REINHARDT** CONTINUES TO MYSTIFY, ASTONISH AND INSPIRE GUITARISTS – EVEN 70 YEARS AFTER HIS UNTIMELY PASSING. SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS HAVE FAITHFULLY AND TIRELESSLY KEPT HIS NAME, LEGACY AND EXTRAORDINARY MUSIC ALIVE TO THE EXTENT THAT, TODAY, THERE IS A GLOBAL SCENE DEDICATED TO **THE 'HOT CLUB' STYLE** THAT CONTINUES TO THRIVE SEEMINGLY INDEPENDENT OF CURRENT TRENDS, NO MORE SO THAN IN THE UK WHERE **A NEW CREW OF DJANGOPHILES** HAVE HAPPILY TAKEN THE MUSICAL BATON THAT DJANGO HIMSELF FORGED BACK IN THE MID-1930S. *GUITARIST* SPEAKS TO SIX YOUNG **PURVEYORS OF 'LA POMPE'** – ALEX BISHOP, CORNELIUS CORKERY, HARRY DIPLOCK, REMI HARRIS, LEWIS KILVINGTON AND CHRIS QUINN – ABOUT **WHAT MAKES DJANGO'S GUITAR SO IMPORTANT, RELEVANT AND VITAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Words Denny Ilett **Poster Image** Francois Guillot/AFP/Getty Images

PHOTO BY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY WILLIAM GOTTLIEB/REDFERNS

The story of Django Reinhardt's life is as well known as it is legendary. Born in Belgium in 1910 to Manouche Romani parents who wintered there each year, his *gadjo* (non-Romani) name was Jean, but to everyone in Romani culture he was Django. Surrounded by music from birth, Django was a quick learner, a prodigy, and was playing professionally in Le Bal-Musette by his mid-teens.

The tragic accident that almost ended his life, let alone his career, is part of guitar folklore. At the age of just 18 he had returned to his caravan after a gig where his wife had prepared a batch of cellophane flowers to sell at market the next day. Django, having knocked a candle over, was confronted by a sudden inferno and suffered terrible burns over his entire left side as he fought to rescue his wife, and himself, from the flames. Many months rehabilitating in hospital eventually brought him back to health, but his left hand was left disfigured to the extent that the third and fourth fingers were drawn back, claw-like, into his palm. Here they remained for the rest of his life, unemployable for single lines, although he did eventually find a way to use them for doublestops when chording.

Left with just his first and second fingers for any lead lines, Django unwittingly created one of the great mysteries in guitar history. How did he do it? How was he able to play with such power, precision and speed with just two left-hand fingers? Besides, it wasn't just overcoming the physical injury that proved Django to be a rare genius. At the beginning of the 1930s, Django had an epiphany as he discovered jazz, the music that would change the direction of his life and that of guitar history.

Django Meets Jazz

When Django heard trumpet titan Louis Armstrong for the first time he burst into tears saying "my brother" quietly to himself. Armstrong was the dominant force in jazz during the late 1920s and early 30s. Alongside his contemporaries he sounded as though he'd come from another planet in much the same way that Jimi Hendrix did four decades later.

Django's almost immediate assimilation of jazz language blended beautifully with his natural Gypsy flair and created a new guitar style and musical genre that has persisted, intact, to this day. It's an approach that Cornelius Corkery describes as "profoundly human", going on to stress that it "cuts right through you regardless of your age". When Corkery first heard Django as a teenager, he recalls: "I couldn't believe a guitar could sound so happy!"

To Chris Quinn, Django's "tone, dynamics and phrasing were mind-blowing," he tells us. "He was a creative genius with an effortless command of his instrument. His entire approach was revolutionary."

Revolutionary it was, and it still sounds so. Django played with complete freedom, often surprising himself when hearing playbacks in the studio, listening as though he were hearing someone else. Being at the cutting edge of something would have meant Django, like his hero Armstrong, had no reference point but his own playing. There was simply nothing else around remotely like it. As Remi Harris points out: "While many great guitarists have their own signature sound and style, Django actually pioneered an entirely new genre of music." That music is now universally known as Gypsy jazz.

From 1934 up until the outbreak of World War II, Django, alongside violinist Stéphane Grappelli, produced a series of legendary recordings as part of the Quintette du Hot Club de France, each showcasing his phenomenal mastery of the fretboard. Blistering chromatic runs, mind-blowing arpeggios, ferocious chording and intense rhythmic drive are just some of Django's assets

PHOTO BY WILLIAM GOTTLIEB/REDFERNS

THE NEW DJANGOPHILES

ALEX BISHOP
Resident columnist Alex is a guitar luthier, repairer and teacher. He runs guitar-making courses from his Bristol workshop and has played with acts such as Sheelanagig

CORNELIUS CORKERY
London-based Cornelius plays regularly around the city and hosts the *Gypsy Jazz Hangouts* podcast, which showcases the genre's best artists

HARRY DIPLOCK
As co-founder of the London Django Collective, Harry tours Django-inspired music across Europe, and shares his expertise via teaching and workshops

REMI HARRIS
With roots in blues, rock and jazz, self-taught Remi has gone from busking to venues such as the Royal Albert Hall. He is the author of *100 Gypsy Jazz Guitar Licks*

LEWIS KILVINGTON
Gypsy jazz teacher Lewis educates his students on the magic of Django's music from his base in Hull and is also part of the Yorkshire Gypsy Swing Collective

CHRIS QUINN
Besides playing live across the UK and Europe, Chris takes his acoustic mastery to Bath's IGF Summer School each year and teaches guitar online

The style of Django's distinctive Selmer guitar has become synonymous with Gypsy jazz

PHOTO BY FRANCOIS GUILLOT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

that continue to perplex guitarists even today. But there was more: a sensitivity with a melodic line, a subtle string bend and clever use of space all contributed to a sense of drama – and even romance – when Django played. "Django's playing is completely unique," says Harry Diplock. "In all this time there has never been another guitarist that plays like Django." For Alex Bishop, Django's playing is "unbelievably melodic". "His phrases are so song-like," he says, "his sense of time/rhythm so smooth and flexible. He's more like a vocalist than a guitarist at times." Despite the fact that Django was one of jazz history's true in-the-moment improvisors, Remi Harris states that Django's playing is "memorable and melodic – many of his solos sound like compositions in their own right".

"Django Reinhardt's music has all the depth, richness and complexity that jazz has to offer yet it remains very accessible" ALEX BISHOP

Django felt an immediate affinity to Louis Armstrong (opposite, far left) on hearing his music in the late 20s, and fused this new jazz influence into his Gypsy style with the Quintette du Hot Club de France (below)

This period, 1947 until his tragic passing in 1953, represents Django's full maturation as a guitar maestro. Again, countless recordings exist of this new Reinhardt – even more driving, daring and ferocious than before. "Django's music evolved as he got older," says Harry Diplock. "The 1930s 'Gypsy jazz' was a mere snapshot of his playing at that time." At this point, Django unwittingly divided his audience with many preferring his earlier work to his bebop explorations. But it always retained that "human touch", as Cornelius Corkery points out, "that romance, feel and emotion. He doesn't lose that. Even when turning up to shred-tastic levels and bombastic fretboard pyrotechnics, it's always human, always real. Real music!"

Django Reinhardt tragically passed away in 1953 after suffering a stroke. He was just 43 years old. For many years after, his music seemed to shrink back into the Romani culture it originally came from and was in danger of falling into obscurity through the 1950s and 60s. It wasn't until 1968 that the Festival Django Reinhardt premiered in Samois-sur-Seine, a village south of Paris, where Django lived in his final years. From there a resurgence began; it was a resurgence that saw a new generation of incredible guitarists rise to prominence including Biréli Lagrène, Boulou Ferré, Fapy Lafertin,

Bebop Era

The end of World War II coincided with the first 'bebop' records appearing in Europe, a new approach to jazz that was pioneered by saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. This music placed the emphasis more on extended chord/scale ideas and was a seismic shift away from the melody driven jazz of the previous 20 years. Django wasted no time incorporating this new musical vision and seemed to master bebop language almost overnight, something many of his American contemporaries were never able to do. Django formed a new quintet with young Parisians, bolted a primitive (but awesome-sounding) Stimer pickup to his guitar and went electric.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Raphaël Faÿs and Django's youngest son, Babik Reinhardt.

The Festival Django Reinhardt continues to this day and still serves as a meeting spot for Romani from across the continent. It's not uncommon to find oneself at a campfire jam session featuring multiple generations of guitarists sparring over endless choruses of Django classics such as *Minor Swing* or *Nuages*. One will hear the tradition and lineage, traceable right back to Django's earliest recordings, in each and every one of these players acting like a common ground from which they can then branch out. One could be forgiven for thinking that the learning and performing of Django's music would be a purely nostalgic pursuit. On the contrary, each generation has successfully blended contemporary influences with the trademark Hot Club sound. This offers yet another important facet of Django's legacy; his music has the flexibility to absorb and incorporate new ideas and, indeed, welcomes them. This is music borne of the past but not stuck in it. "Django with a modern twist," as Lewis Kilvington describes it.

The current crop of players seems to have arrived at Django's door via a variety of musical paths. For example, Cornelius Corkery is a huge admirer of maverick guitarists such as Buckethead and Dimebag Darrell. Chris Quinn started with Clapton, BB King and John Lee Hooker. Alex Bishop set out with contemporary folk and indie influences.

PHOTO BY CINDY ORD/GETTY IMAGES

Incidentally, both Quinn and Bishop are now luthiers as well as players. Remi Harris, meanwhile, came to Django via Peter Green, Hendrix and Led Zeppelin, and Harry Diplock arrived through Muddy Waters and Joe Satriani, and first heard Django on the soundtrack of a computer game. Lewis Kilvington comes from a musical family, his father being a pianist inspired by rock 'n' roll legend Jerry Lee Lewis, hence the name. It's difficult to imagine another guitarist that unites as many contrasting influences as Django Reinhardt seems to.

PHOTO BY CIRCA IMAGES/GHI/UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY HUM IMAGES/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Saxophonist Charlie Parker (left) and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie spearheaded the bebop movement of the late 1940s, which would inspire a new vision in Django

Legacy Lives On

And what of Django's enduring legacy? What keeps his music so fresh into the present day, and what aspects of his playing style and approach make his music so eternally vibrant? Jazz is a music that has always evolved at a dizzying pace and had Django not been such a musical chameleon he'd probably have sounded old-fashioned a mere 10 years after his first recordings. In 2023, however, his music is yet to sound dated.

Today, jazz is divided into two main camps: the nostalgic and the cutting edge. These two camps rarely meet, except when it comes to Django where players are free to be both. Django's music is also accessible enough to appeal to those who wouldn't particularly label themselves as jazz fans. "Django's music is jazz, but you don't have to be a jazz fan to understand or enjoy it," says Remi Harris. "It's simply an infectious style of music to play and listen to." Alex Bishop offers an alternate viewpoint: "What strikes me is the way Django's music is rooted in social gatherings – family gatherings, friends getting together around campfires or late-night sessions in Parisian bars and cafes. In this isolating age of social media young people still crave opportunities to get together and share group experiences."

"Django's music transcends generations, fads and trends. It's hard to imagine this music ever being irrelevant" CORNELIUS CORKERY

The contemporary Hot Club scene is indeed a very social one. Musicians spend as much time hanging out, jamming and sharing ideas as they do fulfilling their professional commitments. Harry Diplock has been on the London scene for over a decade and takes regular trips to Paris to hang out with like-minded Django lovers. He's also co-founder of the London Django Collective, which he describes as "a vibrant collective of musicians writing original music inspired by Django Reinhardt". For Harry, the magic of Django is myriad: "It's a combination of virtuosity and simplicity," he says. "There's also a beauty in playing an acoustic guitar with no amp or effects, which will always get people's attention."

Lewis Kilvington is involved in the Yorkshire Gypsy Swing Collective, a celebration much like its London counterpart. "It's a group dedicated to playing music inspired by Django," he tells us. "I feel very lucky to be able to share and teach Django's music to people from all over the world. Django is still inspiring guitarists of all ages to this day. When I'm teaching my younger students they always react to Django the same way: with amazement."

Remi Harris has his own groups and tours regularly playing a mix of Gypsy jazz, blues and rock. His recent book *100 Gypsy Jazz Guitar Licks* is destined to become something of a bible for the next generation. Says Remi: "Django's life is an amazing story of triumph over adversity. How he managed to overcome his disability and create such extraordinary music is so inspiring. Couple that with inventing a genre of music that has flourished with clubs and festivals all over the world today. There aren't that many musicians who have left such a powerful legacy."

Chris Quinn can be found on both the Gypsy jazz and folk circuits throughout Europe and the US. "Django was a creative genius," he says, "a one-off and, in my opinion, the most important jazz guitarist of all time with a unique sense of note choice, phrasing and a complete understanding of the sound he was going for."

Alex Bishop is now settled in Bristol where he builds Gypsy jazz guitars having toured with folk/jazz festival favourites Sheelanagig. "There's so much of Django's personality reflected in his music that I feel I've got to know him over the years," says Alex. "One imagines that he could express himself musically in ways he never could with words. Also, his music has all the depth, richness and complexity that jazz has to offer yet it remains very accessible."

Cornelius Corkery has been in London for over five years playing the regular Hot Club haunts in the city. He started a podcast, *Gypsy Jazz Hangouts*, in 2020 and is about to take his show 'The Django Songbook' on tour. "Django's music transcends generations, fads and trends," he says. "It's hard to imagine this music ever being irrelevant. Despite the fact that it's a product of its time, Django's music is timeless, innovative and magnificent. Pure music!" G

A jewel of Django's past, this Super-Jumbo Euphonon is from around 1939 and was auctioned from the collection of Scott Chinery in 2016, having been purchased from Django's younger brother Joseph

Man On The Moons

The long-anticipated PRS SE DGT – the David Grissom Tremolo – finally lands in the UK. But just how does this dramatically more affordable SE version stack up to the classic Core model?

Words Dave Burrluck
Photography Phil Barker

PRS SE DGT £979

CONTACT **PRS Guitars Europe** PHONE **01223 874301** WEB **www.prsguitars.com**

What You Need To Know

1 Another signature guitar from an artist we've never heard of?
Well, Texas-based David Grissom has played with an A-list of artists over the years, including Buddy Guy, John Mellencamp , The Allman Brothers Band, Chris Isaak, Robben Ford and John Mayall. He's been a PRS player since 1985 (the first year of the company's production), and along with being the primary driver behind what was to become the PRS McCarty Model in 1994, David has had his own signature guitar since 2007. He also has a signature PRS amp, the DG Custom 30.

2 It looks like a PRS Custom with an extra knob...
The now-classic double-cutaway PRS outline has been used since 1985 on the majority of the brand's models, including the Custom. This SE DGT mirrors the USA Core model in many ways with its unique neck shape, bigger frets, an extra volume control and DGT 'S' pickups.

3 Tell us about those moon inlays.
Back in the day these were the standard inlays used on PRS guitars; the fabled bird inlays were an up-charge option. Today, along with this new Gold Top SE, the only other PRS model that offers moon inlays as standard is the Core DGT.

Early in 2022, PRS let slip that its teams were working on an SE version of the long-running David Grissom Tremolo (DGT). He might not have the A-list profile of the likes of John Mayer, but if you're in the PRS 'family', David Grissom is a very important person. His input into the McCarty Model – appearing in 1994 as the first more vintage-aimed PRS guitar – is well documented and was, of course, the basis for his own signature model. Before his name was applied to the headstock, it was going to be called the 'McCarty II'. That guitar was launched in 2007 at the Austin Summer NAMM Show and was followed by an all-mahogany Standard version in 2012.

A decade on and while little seems to have changed, the DGT has been constantly tweaked in terms of finish, upgraded parts and pickups – like every continuing PRS model – and most recently PRS's TCI process. Plugging in a 2021 Core-level DGT, it's quite the old friend and we're reminded of just why the model has been a cornerstone of PRS over the past 15 years. In today's range the DGT is basically a McCarty (with its slightly thicker body and 22 frets) but with some tweaks. Most obviously, we have the PRS vibrato and an extra control knob, allowing individual pickup volumes and a master tone instead of the McCarty's master volume and tone.

1

The neck shape is unique, too, and we also get bigger fretwire, as used by PRS on the Core Santana Retro. The DGT's covered humbuckers can be coil-split simultaneously by the pull switch on the tone control (see Under The Hood over the page) and are unique to the PRS line.

The build quality and finishing remain a benchmark for our industry, the weight is perfect at 3.35kg (7.37lb), the feel and playability are outstanding, and the sounds, well, if you can't cover any rootsy classic rock with these humbuckers, not to mention the hugely musical split-coils, you need to get practising. We're supposed to be writing about the new SE version and we just can't stop playing this superb Core guitar. It might cost £4k, but the DGT is game-changing. So just how much of this exceptional journeyman vibe can PRS retain with its SE DGT model, which clocks in at quarter of the price?

Quite a lot, it turns out. When our early production prototype sample eventually arrives after shipping delays caused by strikes and snow, it's more than performance-ready. While we detail the specific differences with the USA-made model later on in this feature, the SE DGT comes in a Gold Top finish with moon inlays or in McCarty Tobacco Burst with birds, and it somehow appears – and, to a certain extent, feels – slightly more contemporary compared with the 'it could be vintage' vibe of the USA model. The top carve, now called 'shallow violin', is less contoured and there's none of the dished 'dimple' carving under the controls.

Of course, the hardware, pickups and electronics aren't of the same level as the USA guitar, but there's very little lacking in terms of function. We don't get locking tuners here (although drop-in locking replacements are available from PRS) and

1. The DGT is the only guitar in the current PRS line-up that uses individual pickup volumes and a master tone that also has a pull-switch to voice the partial coil-splits. The control nearest to the bridge is the volume control for the bridge pickup

2. Closely based on the USA pickups, the DGT 'S' humbuckers are made in Indonesia. They're now commonplace in the PRS range, and we can thank David Grissom for introducing the pickup covers that first appeared on the production McCarty Model in 1994

The crescent shape of the control layout means that making subtle adjustments is fast and nuanced

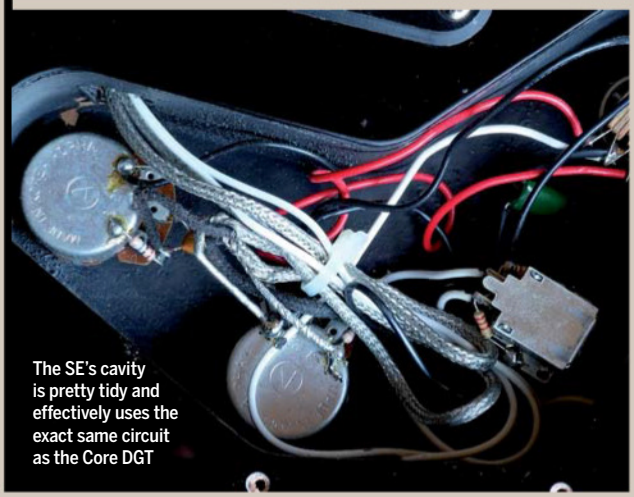
UNDER THE HOOD

What's inside the SE DGT?

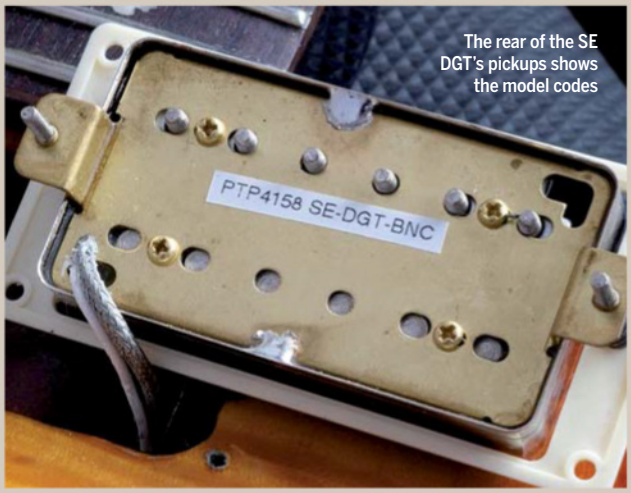
We might get more affordable components here compared with the USA Core model, but the actual circuit and component values appear identical. Our SE uses Alpha 'Made in Korea' stamped pots that we're presuming are 500k, and like the Core model the pull-switch tone control is a mini-pot. The same value resistors are used for the partial splits (2.2kohms on the bridge, 1.1k on the neck: standard PRS values), and it's the inner slug coils that are primarily voiced and when both are on they are hum-cancelling.

The tone cap might be a generic green mylar type that you see on so many Eastern Asian guitars, but it's the same 223J code meaning .022µF. Like the Core model, we have the same value treble bleed capacitors (180pf) on each volume and the same 'tuning' resistors wired in parallel, from the input lug to ground, on each volume pot and valued at 10meg-ohms. This would mean that if the pot has a nominal value of 500k with the added parallel resistor, then the pickup 'sees' 476k.

As ever, PRS doesn't divulge what's under the covers of any of its pickups. These DGT 'S' humbuckers have been designed in the USA but made in Indonesia by PSE, Cor-Tek's pickup making division: the bridge is labelled PTP4159 SE-DGT-TNU and the neck (pictured) is PTP4158 SE-DGT-BNC. In both their DCR readings and what we hear, think medium-hot PAF at the bridge and classic PAF at the neck.



The SE's cavity is pretty tidy and effectively uses the exact same circuit as the Core DGT



The rear of the SE DGT's pickups shows the model codes

3. Back in the day these moon inlays were the standard inlays on PRS guitars and the famous birds were optional. Today, the DGT is the only guitar in the range that still features them. By design, the angle of the crescent moon matches the top curve of the headstock

4. This 'moulded' vibrato is a close cousin of the one used on the Core USA guitars and it brings its own character to the sound compared with PRS's wrapover bridge. The arm is a push-fit and tension-adjustable

the 'moulded' (we'd call it cast) vibrato is deemed good enough to appear on the USA S2 Custom and Standard and the CE 24 models – the semi-hollow version of which currently lists at £2,750. The plastic parts, pickup rings and knobs are more generic than the USA guitar, but, again, these differences have nothing to do with function.

Feel & Sounds

As we illustrate in our SE versus Core comparison after this review, there are minor differences to the neck shape and fretwire, but you may well prefer the less costly date, as we found with the SE version of the USA Silver Sky (in issue 482). There's certainly nothing wrong here. The SE neck does feel marginally bigger, but in the hand it retains the pretty round feel of the USA model with that hint of a 'V' in the lower positions. The frets are slightly wider and a smidge less high, and one difference is the rosewood binding that hides the fret tangs on the SE, although both pieces are noticeably lighter in colour.

Unlike the USA model that ships with 0.011-gauge strings, the SE ships with 0.010 to 0.046 and four instead of five vibrato

4

springs. We're tempted to fit some heavier strings, but the SE's string choice may well have greater appeal. Like the Core model, the SE DGT uses the original PRS scale length of 635mm (25 inches) and this 'halfway between Fender and Gibson' duality is so key to this guitar.

Unplugged, this SE sounds lively and vibrant but certainly not overbright, and when plugged in and in bridge humbucking mode it's big and beefy; what you hear is pretty single-cut-like, not least with a crisp and cookin' Marshall-y voice. There are no sharp edges to be found here – it's almost slightly cocked wah with highs that are rounded but clear, and mids that kick but don't sound over-egged or honky. It's a really creamy voice. The switch through both-on to neck is beautifully graduated, too, and at the neck you're hearing the sort of voice you'd associate with a single-cut Les Paul-style guitar. But pull back those volume controls – even slight rises or dips on these volumes seem almost touch-sensitive – and more subtlety emerges with a cleaner and clearer tone, almost Rickenbacker-meets-Gretsch. And there are some pretty cool rhythm sounds here that love a little waggle from the vibrato.

The scale length's 'halfway between Fender and Gibson' duality is so key to this guitar

Quite often on a humbucker guitar, switching to the single-coil-splits ruins the fun, but we're tempted to argue that's where it starts here. Yes, you lose a little output as you'd expect, but it's far from night and day. The lows and mids sit back and the smother highs of the humbucker mode are replaced with single-coil sparkle and snap. It's Fender-y, a little Tele-like at the bridge (especially when played clean), there's some Strat-y chop at the neck, and with both pickups on things get a little Gretsch-y again. But whatever your ears are telling you, what you hear are very musical, usable single-coil textures that cover considerable ground from funk to indie jangle – particularly with both pickups on and using those dual volumes. When you run the guitar in single-coil mode and kick in an outboard boost with a little tone control roll-off, you're in

THE RIVALS

The current PRS SE range is pretty expansive so the new SE DGT has in-house competition. But it's the only three-control model in the SE range and there's only one other current double-cut 22-fret guitar with vibrato, the SE Custom 22 Semi-Hollow (£979), aside from the bolt-on SE Silver Sky. There's also the 22-fret single-cut SE Tremonti Standard with vibrato and independent volume and tone controls, though this one has no coil-splits.

Among PRS's other launches for 2023 is the vintage-aimed 22-fret SE McCarty 594 (in both double- and single-cut shapes) with its shorter scale length, two-piece bridge and tailpiece, and 58/15 LT 'S' lower-output 'buckers (£TBA).

If you don't mind a 24-fret guitar then the all-mahogany SE Standard 24-08 (£675) and maple-topped Custom 24-08 (£1,0149) come highly recommended, not least that each humbucker can be switched independently to 'true single coil' mode.

The classic PRS headstock holds pretty standard non-locking tuners and the unique blend synthetic nut. As ever, under the DGT cover is the adjustment for the two-way truss rod

PRS SE DGT

PRICE: £979 (inc gigbag)
ORIGIN: Indonesia
TYPE: Double-cutaway, carved-top solidbody electric
BODY: Mahogany with 'shallow violin' carve maple top (w/ flame maple veneer on sunburst model)
NECK: Mahogany, DGT profile, glued-in
SCALE LENGTH: 635mm (25")
NUT/WIDTH: Synthetic/42.9mm
FINGERBOARD: Rosewood, 'moon' inlays, 254mm (10") radius
FRETS: 22, jumbo
HARDWARE: PRS Patented vibrato (cast), PRS designed enclosed tuners – nickel-plated
STRING SPACING, BRIDGE: 52.5mm
ELECTRICS: PRS DGT 'S' Treble and Bass covered humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, individual volume controls and master tone with simultaneous coil-split pull-switch
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 3.51/7.72
OPTIONS: Bird inlays on McCarty Tobacco Sunburst finish
RANGE OPTIONS: See Rivals
LEFT-HANDERS: No
FINISHES: Gold Top (as reviewed), McCarty Tobacco Burst – all high gloss

Guitarist CHOICE 9/10

PROS Detailed build; creamy humbucker voices; excellent single-coil sounds; good weight; stable in-tune vibrato: everything!

CONS Some parts of the guitar are rather generic but remain perfectly functional

that slightly honky 'Tele meets older Les Paul' land. A pretty nice place to be.

One thing, of course, is that the two volumes are reversed from many three-control setups, so the volume knob closest to the bridge pickup is for the bridge, not the neck pickup. But the crescent shape of the control layout means that the controls and pickup switch sit right under your right hand, making subtle adjustments fast and nuanced. There's nothing stopping you from leaving everything full up, of course, but there's just so much more to the sound potential if you use them.

Verdict

After reviewing the most recent SE models such as Paul's Guitar, the Silver Sky and both the Custom and Standard 24-08s, we weren't expecting anything but a stellar performance from this SE DGT – and that's what we get. Is it a facsimile of the USA model at a quarter of the price? No. How can it be? But the SE makes a pretty good stab at emulating the Core version, especially when it comes to the all-important and versatile sounds, and that means we have a very valid musical tool for anyone needing to cover a lot of ground. It's also a very in-tune and stable guitar, as you'd expect from PRS.

> Quite often on a humbucker guitar, switching to the single-coil-splits ruins the fun, but we'd argue that's where it starts here

We're only offered two colours and the Gold Top with those moon inlays is certainly an antidote to the posher flame maple and birds aesthetic of the McCarty Tobacco Burst. It would be nice to see a classic black finish in the future, and how about a Sea Foam Green that'd take us back to where this story all started with David Grissom's '85 PRS?

But whatever the history, or its future, this is a damn fine working guitar that covers pretty much all of the classic genres with the flick or pull of a switch and the twist of a control knob. G

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Long Time Coming

PRS's SE line has featured numerous signatures over the past two decades, including those from Carlos Santana, Mark Tremonti and Bernie Marsden. David Grissom had to wait...

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** PRS Guitars

As a PRS player since 1985 and an official signature artist since 2007, David Grissom seems rather late in joining the SE party. What took so long? "Maybe they were reluctant to bring it up with me because I tend to be pretty hands on," laughs David today. "To be honest, I'm pretty shocked because the DGT actually came out some 15 years ago. I thought it'd have a lifespan of three or four years and here it is doing better than ever, so PRS is doing something right – we're doing something right. I guess they thought this was the right time."

PRS's COO, Jack Higginbotham, weighs in: "I always liked David personally and his guitar playing; he's very talented and I'm always surprised when other people aren't [so] familiar with him. I like the thought of giving him his due.

"I have a friend who owns an older DGT model," Jack continues, "and I mentioned we were working with David on a new pickup and he said he'd like to check those out, so he shipped me the guitar so we could get it to current specs. It came to my office and I pulled it out, put my hand around the neck and went, 'Holy smokes, man – I love these guitars!' I like the way the neck feels, I like the intention of the instrument. I was just noodling on it and that's really what planted the seed: how awesome would it be if we could give more people around the world the opportunity to have the experience to play one of these things?"

"I've been onboard since day one," continues David, "and they [PRS] have been very cool. I said so long as I can pull the plug on it at any point if it's not up to snuff then I'm cool with giving it a shot. It's been very rewarding."

The project has taken about a year, although "the heavy lifting has been done over the past 20 years", continues David, "through the McCarty and then the DGT. The challenge was to make that guitar translate to something that costs 25 per cent of the Core DGT model. The whole philosophy and specs were in place, so it was a much different project than coming up with a completely new model."

Doing Time

You could suggest that the SE DGT's journey to production actually started in 1985. This was when David traded in a 1959 Fender Esquire for a first year of production PRS all-mahogany 'Standard' (although it wasn't actually called that until 1987). Meanwhile, his Fiesta Red 1960 Strat, which he'd previously bought in Memphis for $400, became a spare.

"The PRS had more horsepower with the [humbucking] pickups," says David, "but it wasn't like a Les Paul; it didn't have as much low-end. At the time I was playing with Joe Ely and it was like my 'Tele on steroids'. It sat in the mix in a really nice place – I was playing Marshalls with 4x12s at the time and there was so much low-end coming out of the amp setup. Midrange is really your friend in the electric guitar world. The 25-inch scale really appealed to me, the tremolo stayed in tune, it was Seafoam Green and nobody else was playing them!

> "The heavy lifting has been done over the past 20 years through the McCarty and then the DGT" ***David Grissom***

"The Strat made me play in a certain way, but the '85 seemed like it was a blank canvas," he adds, "which was appealing in a town of Strat players – an opportunity to do something different, especially in a trio with Joe Ely. I got that guitar and the first Marshall at the same time, so the combination was really the beginning of me getting my own sound."

Paul Reed Smith caught David in action at the Dallas Guitar Show in 1987 and subsequently gifted him another key guitar: an '87 Gold Top Standard (which, confusingly, had a maple top at the time). Surviving neck breaks and more, the guitar was used with Joe Ely and John Mellencamp before David custom-ordered a PRS in 1991 with a more vintage aim in mind, including a 22-fret neck, thicker

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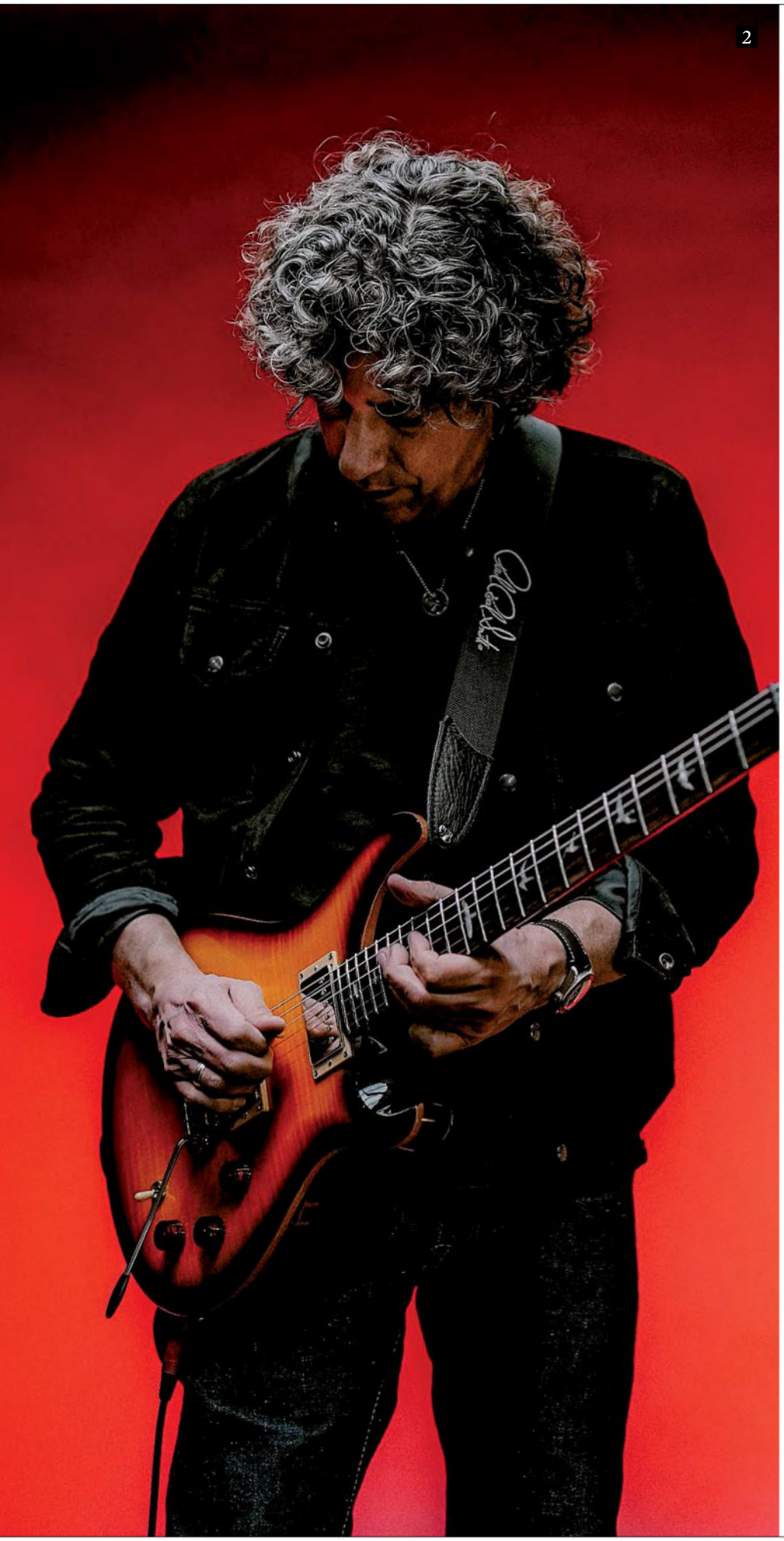


1. Jack Higginbotham (right) with a Cor-Tek employee at the Indonesian factory where the SE DGT models are brought to life

2. David Grissom's relationship with PRS began in the mid-80s, his US signature was released in 2007 – and today we have the SE

mahogany back and PRS's then brand-new Stoptail wrapover bridge.

"The PRS artist relations person I was working with at the time, Bonnie Lloyd, was all into it," remembers David today of that original sunburst custom-order. "There was some scepticism in the company that the changes weren't going to make any difference. My intuition was, 'I need a little more clarity, a little more low-end and not quite as much midrange.' I didn't necessarily mean getting rid of midrange but expanding the top and bottom to get a little wider sound, a little clearer pickup. When they brought it to the Winter NAMM Show in 1992 I think there were a lot of people who really dug it. That guitar became the McCarty Model [which launched in 1994].

"It was the first [PRS] guitar that has an 1/8 th-inch more mahogany on the back. I think it's the first PRS that has covers on the pickups, the first with that [then slightly increased] headstock angle and the first with Klusons – there are so many firsts. I think we used two Bass [neck] pickups just to try to get that clarity. This was sort of the beginning for me of getting away from the more midrange-y Treble and Bass [pickups] and getting it a little more full range, a purer, clearer tone. The pre-McCarty McCarty."

About two months after that first custom-order, David ordered another. "I said, 'Give me the same guitar but with a trem,' because I used the trem so much. I probably used that guitar more on records than the Stoptail guitar, but today when I A/B those two guitars, the one with the Stoptail... I don't know whether it's the time that's gone by or what ... but it's really a magic guitar."

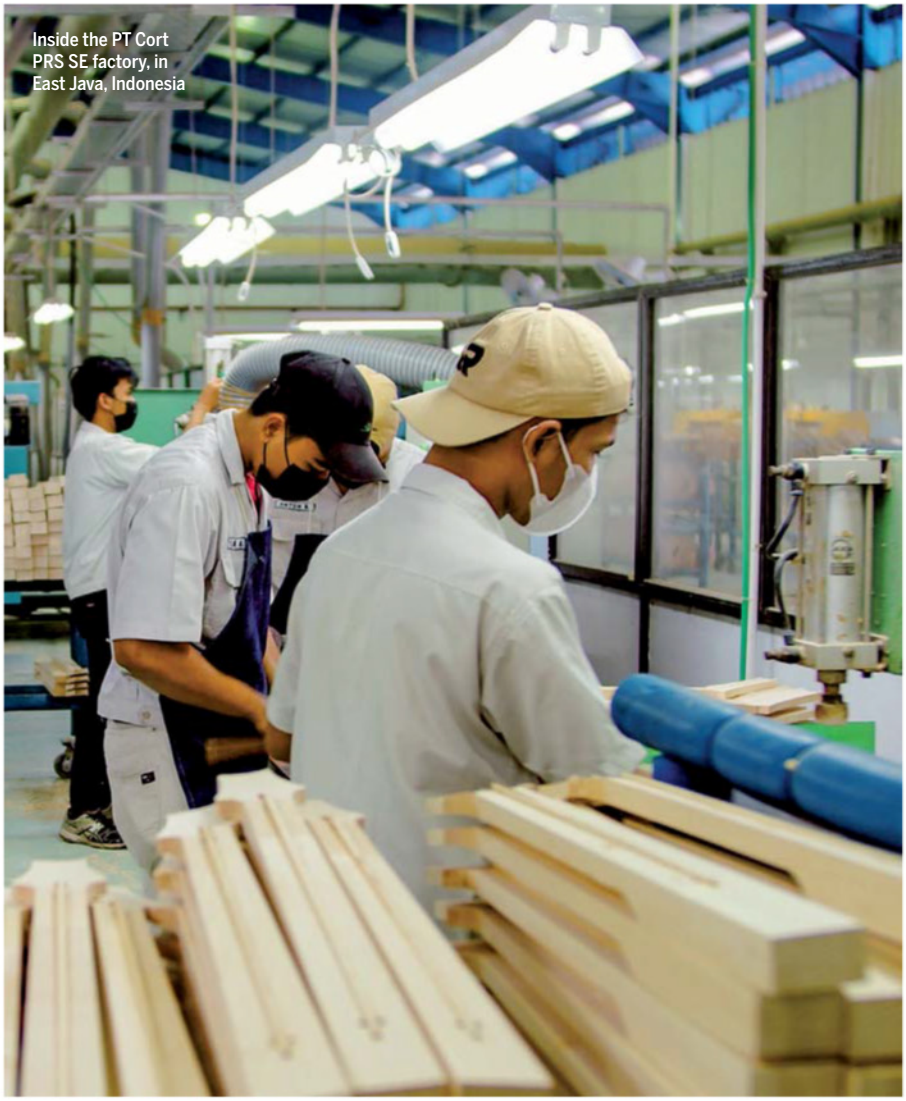
The David Grissom Tremolo (DGT) launched in 2007 after 15 years of touring and recording and a heck of a lot of experimentation, particularly in finding the right pickup recipe. "In many ways, the DGT was a combination of numerous small changes, although I would argue that the pickups were a big change," David explained to us back in 2010. "I think they were a real step forward. They were a year-long project for me to try to capture the sound I was looking for." Working alongside

veteran guitar repairer Ed Reynolds who had constructed a guitar so that David could swap pickups in seconds, David evaluated 40 to 50 different pickup sets that were wound by Paul, plus many more from boutique makers.

Sound Choice

While PRS is now well into its stride in replicating the essence of its USA-made pickups in Indonesia, David was initially apprehensive, as he relates in one of three short videos released recently by PRS on the birth of the SE guitar: "I was real sceptical about the pickups. I spent a couple of years going back and forth on the [original DGT] pickups so I said, 'How are you going to tell the guys in Indonesia how to make these pickups that took sweat and blood to finally arrive here?'"

Jack explains that the process was similar to the development of other Indonesian-made 'S' pickups: "We let Cor-Tek use the materials they can get and then we play with the recipe to get that sound where we need [it] to be. I actually had pickups before I had a guitar. We wound those pickups to what we thought they were going to be and we sent a guitar – an all-mahogany PRS S2 Standard – to David."



Inside the PT Cort PRS SE factory, in East Java, Indonesia

> "I like the intention of the [Core DGT]. That's really what planted the seed [for the SE]"
>
> ***Jack Higginbotham***

"They were in the ballpark," David says. "I think I said, 'I'm willing to consider them, but there is no way I can tell you anything different until we get them into the *actual* SE guitar.' The pickups amplify the sound of the guitar and I just think that the acoustic properties of an electric guitar often are undervalued. So they asked if I thought they were close enough, I said, 'Yes, but I have to hear them in a version of the SE DGT.' And when they did that I was blown away. As soon as we got those pickups into the right guitar I was knocked out. I was like, 'We're done!'"

Neck & Neck

The pickups weren't the only challenge; the SE DGT's neck shape caused a few more problems along the way, including that the DGT's neck profile is unique to the PRS range. "Originally, we measured the '87 Gold Top and then we measured the '93 'McCarty' that I'd used forever," David tells us, "so we interpolated those two guitars, which were my favourite necks."

But replicating that shape in Indonesia is something that Jack – "hands down" – found the hardest part of the jigsaw. "The width is slightly narrower in higher positions as I fret with my thumb," explains David of the DGT's neck. "Then if the fret ends are too slanted you lose some of the real estate, so this way I can have the width I want but not have the strings fall off the edge of the fingerboard – a balance without the bigger frets feeling like railroad tracks."

It is different from the Pattern Vintage profile that Jack and the team have replicated for the new SE 594s. "It's a 32nd-inch narrower at the nut," Jack says. "It's about the same front-to-back, but the shoulders are taken out so it's got a sort of V'd feel from the 1st to the 5th fret; the taper is different, obviously because of the width. I think of it as if you go back to 1985 – it's real close to the original PRS 'regular' neck profile before there was a Wide Thin."

"On the first batch [of SE prototypes] the necks were too big, too round," David remembers. "I mean, every Core DGT is slightly different due to the hand-finishing [sanding]. Over the years the specs have varied slightly [with] the CNC programme, but I have a good set of callipers and I picked the DGT that I play the most [from 2010] and we had a long Zoom meeting where I measured every dimension and that's what we were shooting for – to recreate my favourite neck. On the second go around we were much, much closer. I'm holding one of the last four prototypes, I'm not playing what's coming off the line. If anything, it's on the slightly bigger beefier end – it's not one of the skinnier ones.

"[Developing the SE] was not *anything* like the process on the original DGT," concludes David. "Jack Higginbotham and everyone at PRS did a great job, and they were so conscientious and respectful about making sure I was cool with it all. They know I would have told them if it wasn't [laughs]. If I'm going to put my initials on a guitar, then it's got to be something I'll play – and I will play it." G

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Sibling Rivalry

Less a copy, more an ‘inspired by’ design, the SE DGT cleverly emulates the USA model but with plenty of differences

Words Dave Burrluck **Photography** Phil Barker

PRS USA (LEFT) & SE

PRS USA (LEFT) & SE

PRS USA (TOP) & SE

As PRS's Jack Higginbotham tells us, building this SE wasn't straightforward, not least that the guitar had to satisfy the "uncompromising soul" that is David Grissom. "The DGT is the result of a lot of years and a lot of gigs," Jack tells us. "I think the difference is that David says, 'This is what I want.' David knows what he wants; he approaches the guitar like a guitar builder. He speaks our language." Let's take a close look at the differences between the SE and Core DGT.

Headstock Style

The very identifiable PRS headstock dates back to the first production guitars made in 1985. Both guitars appear to have the same back angle and pretty much the same thickness at just under 16mm. While many Core models use a headstock facing, the DGT doesn't. The signature logo is raised on the DGT and gold in colour, while the SE's silver paint logo sits under the clear top coat and has the 'SE' ID underneath, of course. While both truss rod covers bear the same 'DGT' logo, the USA guitar's is anodised aluminium and the SE's is black plastic. The Core's top nut is very smartly cut from bone; the SE uses a black synthetic material, a little taller than the Core model but nicely cut nonetheless.

The SE's tuners are perfectly good generic enclosed-style but aren't locking. They are contrasted on the Core model by the beautifully engineered and proprietary Phase III top-locking tuners with their open backs and unplated brass string posts. The cream ivoroid buttons reduce weight, too.

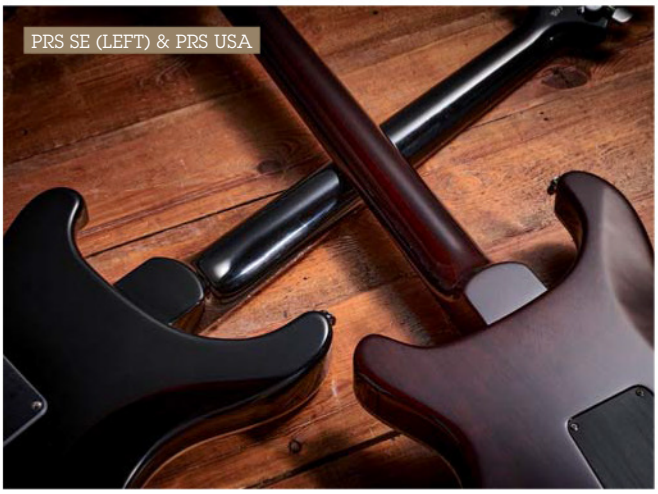
The SE clearly states who makes the guitar and where, although there's no country of origin on the USA Core guitar, just the hand-written serial number beginning with the year of manufacture.

Neck & Fingerboard

While the Core's neck, back and headstock have a lightly translucent deep brown finish, the SE's is opaque and is almost black in colour, which makes any comments about the wood or the construction underneath impossible. The Core's Indian rosewood is a deep dark brown, the fret tangs easily visible on the sides. The bird inlays here (moons are optional) use a vintage ivory coloured acrylic outline with green 'standard' abalone centres. The SE's fingerboard, simply classed as rosewood, is noticeably lighter brown in colour with some striping and is actually bound by two thin stripes of the same material, which hides the fret tangs. The solid 'old-school' bird inlays of the Sunburst SE appear to be a pearloid and are less brightly coloured than the vivid birds of the Core model. Likewise, the two-piece moon inlays on the Gold Top SE (not pictured) have a lot less contrast than the Core's birds: the crescent moon is pearl-like and the 'sky' looks like a darker grey abalone or similar, but both could just as easily be synthetic.

We can only go by what we see, feel and measure and the specific neck size and shape of the Core model is a little different to the two SE samples we have to examine. The DGT's nut width is quoted as 42.06mm but measures a little wider just where the nut meets the actual fingerboard at 42.6mm. The SE's nut measures 42.25mm, while the fingerboard just in front of that is 43.25mm. At the fingerboard end – so measured at the 22nd fret – the DGT is spec'd at 56.337mm and measures 56.42mm, while the SE measures 56.69mm.

The depths follow a similar pattern. At the 1st fret, the Core is spec'd at 21.41mm and measures 21.8mm; at the 12th it's


PRS SE (LEFT) & PRS USA

PRS SE

PRS SE (LEFT) & USA

PRS USA

spec'd at 24.2mm and measures 24.3mm. The SE is only slightly deeper: 22mm at the 1st fret, 24.8mm by the 12th.

As for the frets, both use a pretty big wire, with the Core's measuring approximately 2.74mm by 1.32mm, and the SE's measuring slightly wider but pretty much the same height at 2.81mm by 1.3mm.

The Core's fingerboard sides are slightly incurving, too, and the top edges are rolled to simulate wear, which gives a Core PRS a played-in, comfortable feel. The SE's fingerboard edges seem a little squarer, although the top edges are rolled, but comparing the two, your hand tells you that the edges on the SE feel slightly 'sharper'. The actual neck profiles do feel very similar, with a very slight hint of a V in lower positions with a rounder, full C as you move up. Despite the slight dimensional differences, your hand would swear the SE neck feels slightly 'bigger'.

PRS began using a larger heel on the 22-fret models of the early 1990s. Here, the heels both look very similar, although the SE's is a few millimetres longer, extending pretty much 50mm from the body to the tip in the centre of the heel, while the Core is closer to 44mm.

Bodies

While the Core's top carve has subtly changed over the years – not least when PRS moved away from its original dupli-carver to CNC – it's one area that needs very careful hand-sanding, especially during the finishing process. It was never designed for mass production and, we're told, still causes problems to this day. The main surface of the SE's 'shallow violin' carve is flat with the light contouring occurring on the edges only, and there are no divots under the controls or around the toggle switch.

Despite David Grissom's request back in the day for a slightly thicker mahogany back bringing the overall depth of what was to become the McCarty to 52.2mm, this SE version is noticeably thinner overall at 45.25mm. However, the mahogany back is slightly thicker than that of the Core DGT at 33.3mm as opposed to 30.6mm, while the maple top is thinner at 12mm against the Core version's 20.5mm top. All this means that the mahogany-to-maple ratio of the SE is around 3:1 and on the Core DGT is around 3:2.

The Core DGT is the lightest in weight, too, at 3.35kg (7.37lb); our SE Gold Top weighs 3.51kg (7.72lb), and the sunburst model weighs 3.65kg (8.03lb).

The type of mahogany or maple isn't specified on either guitar, but the Core uses one-piece stock for both the body and the neck with a centre-joined, book-matched top that has quite a subdued, classic figure. You can see on the natural edge that the SE's maple top is three pieces and on the sunburst uses a figured maple veneer that's not book-matched, though has quite light figuring again. The yellow centre of the 'burst is a stronger colour with less brown bursting around the edges, notably the top horns, which contrasts the darker, older-looking colour of the Core model.

It's a tall order to replicate a PRS Core model at 25 per cent of the price, not least that it's a signature designed to satisfy David Grissom

PRS SE

PRS SE

PRS USA

PRS USA

Vibrato Style

The different vibratos are visually close cousins, but the Core's Generation III vibrato is machined and uses brass for its full-size deep-drilled block, top plate and saddles. It also features tracks for the saddles to prevent any sideways movement. The SE vibrato (also used on the S2 and bolt-on CE 24 models) is all steel and cast, not machined. Both have a push-fit tension-adjustable arm, and both appear to be stainless steel with a black plastic tip, though the SE's is slightly smaller in diameter than the Core at 4.5mm, as opposed to 4.75mm.

As set, there's slightly less up-bend on the SE vibrato, which floats slightly closer to the body. But both SE and Core models have a pretty identical setup with very slight neck relief and a string height at the 12th fret of just over 1.5mm, slightly higher but barely so on the bass side.

The black plastic backplates that cover the vibrato springs and the control cavity aren't recessed on the SE, whereas they are on the Core. The SE also uses a more generic metal 'football' jack plate as opposed to the Core's classier rectangular anodised aluminium plate. Those PRS strap buttons (which are modelled after the string retainer of a Fender bass) aren't copied on the SE model, which uses more generic-style buttons.

Pickups

As PRS players and fans will know, the company remains very secretive about what's inside its pickups and, while never publicised, it's fair to say the DGTs have been tweaked over the years. Measuring the DCRs at output gives us approximately 8.72/5.83kohms for the full coil/split at the bridge, and 7.42/4.57k at the neck. The SE DGT 'S' humbuckers were designed in the USA and made in Indonesia by PSE, Cor-Tek's pickup-making division. The same full coil/split DCR readings are pretty close at 8.44/4.98k for the bridge and 7.43/5.08k for the neck.

Feel & Sounds

As we say, it's a tall order to replicate a PRS Core model at 25 per cent of the price, not least that it's a signature model designed to satisfy David Grissom. Face on, they look pretty similar, but as we've discussed the differences are there to see and feel once you have both in your hands. From a player's perspective, however, the almost less-fussy 'Junior' style of the SE certainly shouldn't be overlooked. The key functional elements are replicated, and while the neck does feel a little bigger and perhaps not quite as elegant in style as the Core, in isolation it's got quite an appealing 'bigger old-Gibson' vibe that's very credible, especially if you like a little more meat.

Sound-wise, they're not chalk and cheese – far from it, in fact. The Core DGT is very rounded in the high-end and smooth, which may be too dark for some, especially played clean. Conversely, the almost bell-like response with a full virtually single-cut 'body' to the sound is huge. The SE does sound a little brighter with somewhat less body to the sound, but in the context of a band it's certainly not £3k away. We found ourselves using the tone control more on the SE, namely to just pull back the brighter sparkle of the single-coil voices, which give the SE a little more of a contemporary sheen. The Core model does sound older – it's a little more mature. And it moves from classic Les Paul-like grunt to delicate jazzy and soulful rhythm fills with just a nudge of the controls. But, to be honest, we could say exactly the same about the SE.

Polished Performers

Larrivée's 44 Legacy Series introduces a range of guitars in a selection of body sizes, each with an upgraded high-gloss finish. Let's find out exactly how they shine

Words David Mead **Photography** Phil Barker

LARRIVÉE 0-44R, 000-44R & OMV-44R

£2,649, £2,899 & £3,229

CONTACT **440 Distribution** PHONE **0113 2842342** WEB **www.larrivee.com**

What You Need To Know

1. **These look very similar to Larrivée's 40 Series acoustics...**
Well spotted! The only real difference in terms of spec is the full gloss finish and there's a hike in the retail price, too. Also, the Legacy 44 Series has to be specially ordered from Larrivée.

2. **No pickups onboard?**
All models can be ordered with pickups factory fitted. Not every player will want or need a pickup installed in their acoustic – while others might have a favourite make that isn't on offer from Larrivée.

3. **Does the high-gloss finish make any tonal difference?**
There's been controversy about this for years. Of course, it depends on what type of gloss finish we're talking about as there are a few options available. We've had varied experiences with gloss or satin finishes and have concluded the difference is more to do with how the guitar feels in the hand rather than with the tone. Results vary, though.

Larrivée's acoustic guitars have charmed us often in the past. With build quality that's typically very sharp, Jean Larrivée's team of builders – based now in Oxnard, California, and originally hailing from Canada – deliver the business time after time. So we were excited to hear that there was another batch heading our way from across the Atlantic.

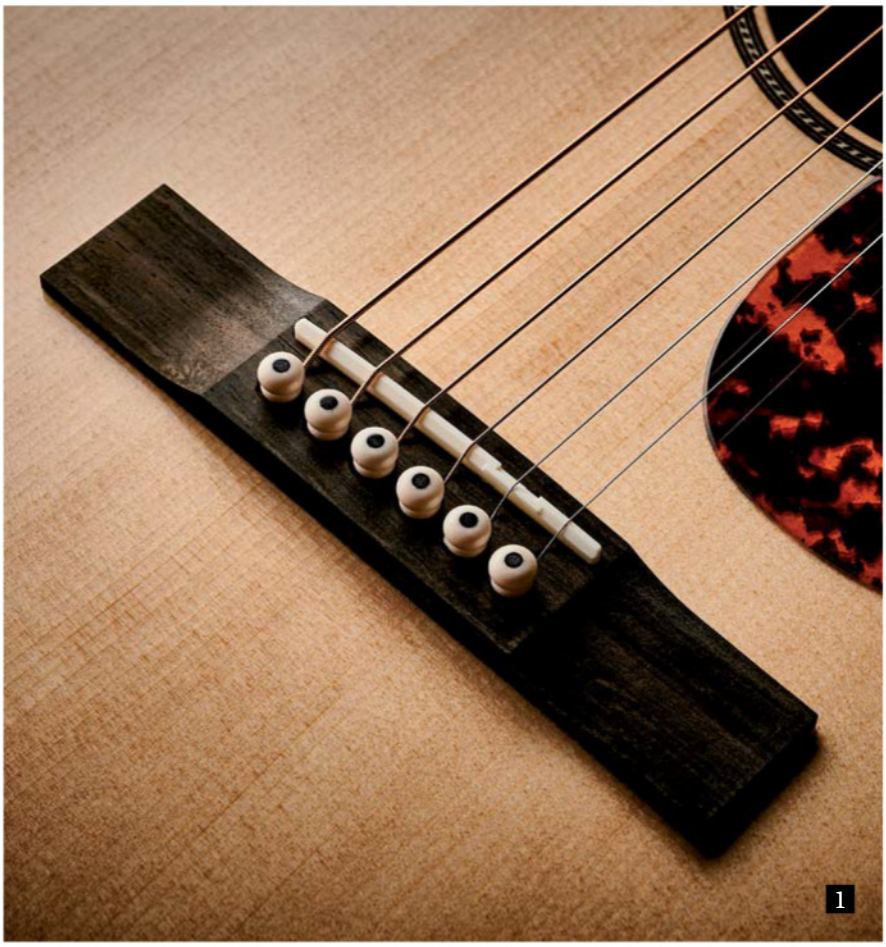
These latest guitars belong to the 44 Legacy Series, which itself is based on the models from the 40 Legacy Series – the difference being that the 44s offer a high-gloss finish as opposed to the 40s' satin. Whether this was a request from the established acoustic-guitar fraternity (who like their instruments to look like mama used to make...) or not remains unclear. Let's just take things at face value here. It's also worth noting that the 44 models have to be specially ordered via a Larrivée dealer, as opposed to the more off-the-peg nature of the 40 range.

If you're wondering what the Legacy Series comprises, the answer is really in the title. All the guitars therein are based on traditional body sizes from days of yore. So you have the baby of the group, the 0 model, right up to a dreadnought, passing through the 00, 000, OM with a few variations chucked in for good measure.

Construction is tried-and-true traditional, too, with no real surprises in terms of body woods along the way. Both the staple mahogany or rosewood back and sides options are catered for in the 40 Series, but here our 44s are rosewood only. As far as body dimensions are concerned, we had our pick and decided to pluck out an 0, an OMV (essentially an OM with a cutaway) and a 000 in order to cover as much of the acoustic well-trodden path as possible.

Construction is tried-and-true traditional, with no surprises in terms of body woods along the way

As you can see from the prices listed above, we're not talking impulse purchase budget or mid-price ranges here; we're considering guitars that will be a target for the semi-pro to pro market. Obviously, the desire is for a top-class, well-constructed package that will stand everything from occasional gigging to full-on touring. We've heard from luthiers in the past that building an instrument that's both strong



THE RIVALS

We're talking about a selection of different body sizes here, but if you're looking to buy an acoustic in the £2.5k to £3.3k range then your first port of call will probably be Martin, who originated the acoustic size definitions in the first place. The company has many alternatives on offer, such as the Standard 000-18 clocking in at around the £3k mark. A Standard OM is priced at around £3,229 and an 0-18 Standard at £2,699.

Taylor carries a range of body size options, too, with the GT Range offering compact body sizes (prices vary according to model) through the Grand Concert, right up to Grand Auditorium. A perusal of the company's website is advised.

Other manufacturers would include Furch, Yamaha and Eastman who provide a full range of body dimensions in their catalogues. You might even find what you're looking for in the bespoke arena, too; check out Atkin and Fylde, for example

1. All three of these Larrivée Legacy Series acoustics have Sitka spruce for the top wood

2. Fretboards are ebony, a traditional option for acoustic guitars, with mahogany for the necks

enough to cope with the rigours of the road and yet be sweet-sounding with a full set of frequencies is a difficult nut to crack. So let's dig in and see how Larrivée has fared in this respect.

Before we begin, though, we'll cover a question that you might be asking yourself. If these guitars are intended for the pro market, how come they're not fitted with pickups? The answer is that, seeing as the 44s are by-order only, if you want a pickup installed then Larrivée offers a range of LR Baggs options, with a price hike of between £199 to £269, depending on which model of pickup is appropriate. Sounds like a sensible idea to us. After all, there's nothing worse than finding a guitar that ticks all the boxes for you but then has a pickup installed that doesn't float your boat. It's a choice that bespoke builders offer their clients and so it's not at all out of place here.

On to the guitars themselves, then, and despite the fact we have three different models of varying dimensions, the actual menu of woods and accessories remains pretty much consistent. A side note of this, of course, is it's interesting to see exactly what sort of differences there are in terms of performance from the different body sizes. But more of that later. First, let's run down the basic build details.

3. The OMV-44R has a superbly rendered cutaway with what Larrivée refers to as "Bold Rope" inlay around the guitar's edge

The backs and sides for all three are Indian rosewood, while the tops are Sitka spruce. As many players will know, this is a winning combination and sits at the very heartland of acoustic guitar building. On all three instruments the grain on the spruce is fairly wide, to the extent that it takes on the look of Adirondack. And, naturally, it's fresh-from-the-workbench pale, but will soon begin to take on the more familiar yellowing, given time.

4. Under the hood, Larrivée tells us that we'll find "scalloped hybrid" bracing in order to produce maximum strength using the least amount of material

The necks here are all single-piece mahogany and the fretboards are ebony. Saddles and top nuts are bone, the former being compensated to ensure stable intonation and the latter measuring in at what is rapidly becoming the new norm for acoustics, 44mm. The bridges are ebony, too, and the inlay around the bodies is what Larrivée refers to as "Bold Rope", which, to our eyes at least, is not a million miles away from herringbone, and the outer binding is figured maple.

As you may have gathered, everything here takes a centre line through the tradition of acoustic guitar building. And as far as what's going on under the Sitka tops is concerned, Larrivée tells us that "scalloped hybrid" bracing is the order of the day, adding, "we blended a non-symmetrical scalloped lateral cross-bracing pattern with our tried-and-true balanced X-Brace system. This means maximum strength using the least amount of material."

Feel & Sounds

The 0-44 is the smallest of the bunch, with a reduced scale length of 609mm (24 inches), 12 frets to the body, plus a sort of parlour-ish diminutive compactness. We did notice that initial tuning was a game of stop and start, and orchestrated with the occasional 'ping', owing to a couple of minor nut issues that clearly missed QC and could easily be fixed

5. The trio has open-back 18:1 ratio tuners that add both a touch of vintage chic and some extra precision when it comes to staying in tune

with a nut file. Nothing serious and it would probably be fixed at point of sale.

The feel is good. It's compact enough to play comfortably on a sofa and the neck – a generous shallow C – feels good in the hands. Sound-wise, whereas it's inevitable that a body size this small is going to result in a little boxiness, this isn't at all pronounced. In fact, there's a sweetness and good balance to the overall output that's really quite endearing. Both fingerstyle and strumming yield good results and whereas you're hardly going to get a dreadnought response from an 0-sized acoustic, it packs a good sized punch, all the same.

Moving on to the 000-44, we retain the 12-frets-to-the-body 'board but with the more familiar 648mm (25.5-inch) scale length. With the increase in body size the output takes a step up with a more robust bass response, but the trebles maintain their sweet nature and the mids are all present and correct. There's a transparent quality to the tone that is inspiring. Our hands tell us that the neck seems wider, but the ruler denies this. An illusion, then, no doubt.

The last of the trio is the 14-frets-to-the-body cutaway OM, which is the most expensive of the bunch. As we know, 000s

6. The headstocks here are attractively understated with ebony facings and inlaid logos

Everything here takes a centre line through the tradition of acoustic guitar building

and OMs are very close in terms of spec and everything we've said before about sweetness, punch and clarity in response from all the frequency ranges remains true. It's just that the cutaway makes things easier if you're adventurous enough to stray up the neck. If anything, we'd say that the 000 has a smidge more robustness in the bass and lower mids, but the OM has everything it needs in terms of balance between lows, mids and highs.

7. The high-gloss 44 Series can be ordered with a choice from a range of LR Baggs pickups

8. Originally based in Canada, Larrivée relocated to Oxnard, California in 2001

Verdict

Once again, Larrivée has provided us with some instruments that we were truly happy to spend time with. All three have a lot of character and would suit a range of briefs, depending on a player's needs.

The 0-size, although diminutive in stature, provides a great slice of acoustic goodness and would be a worthwhile companion for someone who favours smaller-bodied instruments. If we were asked to choose, the 000 is possibly our favourite – it's an all-rounder in every sense. Chock-full of good tone, with a body size that's neither too big nor too small. The cutaway OMV has a lot of charm and would provide a gigging acoustic player with just about everything they need for either a singer-songwriter strummer or fingerstyle soloist situation.

So where it might be tempting to look to the major players when venturing into this price range, it's definitely worth remembering Larrivée's presence in the market, as you may very well find exactly what you're looking for. G

LARRIVÉE 0-44R

PRICE: £2,649 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: 0-sized acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 102mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 336mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 609mm (24")
TUNERS: Open back 18:1 ratio
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 18
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/56.3mm
ELECTRICS: Optional (see below)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.56/3.46
OPTIONS: LR Baggs pickup factory installed from £199 to £269 (depending on model). Non-gloss 40 Series model 0-40R (£2,279)
RANGE OPTIONS: The LA 44 Series comprises the models featured in this review plus the LA OM-44R (£2,899) and the dreadnought D-44R (£2,899)
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge
FINISH: High Gloss

8/10

PROS Compact, characterful and surprisingly boisterous for its size

CONS This 0-sized body always sacrifices some bass-end, so may not suit all players

LARRIVÉE 000-44R

PRICE: £2,899 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: 000-size acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 114mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 390mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Open back 18:1 ratio
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 18
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/57mm
ELECTRICS: Optional (see below)
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.22/4.9
OPTIONS: LR Baggs pickup factory installed from £199 to £269 (depending on model). Non-gloss 000-40R (£2,279)
RANGE OPTIONS: See 0-44R
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge
FINISH: High Gloss

8/10

PROS Delightful instrument, packed with sweet trebles and girthy mids and basses

CONS Might be overlooked in favour of the major manufacturers at this price point

LARRIVÉE OMV-44R

PRICE: £3,229 (inc case)
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: OM-sized acoustic
TOP: Sitka spruce
BACK/SIDES: Indian rosewood
MAX RIM DEPTH: 108mm
MAX BODY WIDTH: 387mm
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 648mm (25.5")
TUNERS: Open back 18:1 ratio
NUT/WIDTH: Bone/44mm
FINGERBOARD: Ebony
FRETS: 20
BRIDGE/SPACING: Ebony/57mm
ELECTRICS: See below
WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.8/4.02
OPTIONS: LR Baggs pickup factory installed from £199 to £269 (depending on model). Non-gloss OMV-40R (£2,699)
RANGE OPTIONS: See 0-44R
LEFT-HANDERS: Yes, no upcharge
FINISH: High Gloss

8/10

PROS A toneful all-rounder that would suit practically any gigging situation

CONS Price with pickup vaults it into the major league for all but serious pros

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Rocket Science

Strymon's excellent first-generation effects have undergone the V2 treatment for added flexibility and even better tone

Words Trevor Curwen **Photography** Phil Barker

STRYMON V2 PEDALS **FROM £329**

CONTACT **MusicPsych** PHONE **0207 607 6005** WEB **www.strymon.net**

What You Need To Know

1. **Haven't we seen these before?** You could be forgiven for thinking that because there are no V2 logos to be seen on these chassis, but look closer and you'll see that each pedal has changes in its control surface from the original incarnation.

2. **You mean these V2 pedals have got more knobs?** Yes, apart from the Flint, however, which looks pretty much the same. Every one of them, though, has increased socketry and major upgrades under the hood.

3. **So they're improved versions...** That's the idea – these replace the original pedals and offer increased flexibility plus improved sound and playability while retaining the essence of what made them so good in the first place.

In a revamp of some of its most popular but older pedals, Strymon has come up with new V2 versions of six effects to replace the original versions (which are incidentally still available until they've all sold out). Under the hood, each pedal has had a processing upgrade and now features an ARM processor that not only has more power but also consumes less energy than previous versions. Also changed is the interaction between guitar and pedal via a JFET input circuit that's designed to offer improved sound and touch response. There's easy access to full stereo input and output, if desired, as all of the pedals now have a TRS input that's configured by a rear-panel Mono/Stereo switch, rather than messing around inside the pedal with an internal jumper.

If you're a MIDI user perhaps the most welcome change is that all the pedals now have full MIDI control with synchronisation to MIDI clock for any features that would benefit from that – and access to 300 presets. This is all facilitated by a TRS MIDI jack and a USB-C connection that allows bi-directional MIDI communication with a single cable using Strymon's Conduit interface. Editor/librarian software is coming soon.

> With easier and deeper control of important parameters, dialling in sounds is much faster

The obvious visual difference between these new pedals and the older versions is that each now has a consistent six knobs and two toggle-switches on the front panel – with the exception of the Flint, which retains the same layout as before. In the past, Strymon pedals' secondary functions were accessed by holding down footswitches while turning the relevant knob, a somewhat frustrating experience when you need to make adjustments. On the new layouts, some of the more crucial of those secondary functions now have dedicated top-panel knobs. The overall effect is a huge upgrade that gives easier control of an increased – and perhaps more relevant – range of parameters.

With V2 of the BlueSky you can now instantly add variable amounts of shimmer to your reverb sound

Ambience Advanced

The oldest Strymon pedal, the BlueSky reverb, now faces much more competition than when it was originally released in 2009, not least from the company's own BigSky, from which the V2 takes some cues to bring it up to date. First off, there are tweaked Plate and Room algorithms, while the Spring algorithm has been completely changed to the one you'd find in the BigSky – a superb rendition of the real electro-mechanical thing. You can now add variable shimmer to any of the reverbs via a dedicated knob, with high shimmers for the Plate and Room, and the Spring gets a quirky-but-cool low octave with pulsing tremolo. You also now get a choice of adding Light or Deep chorus-like modulation.

1. The rear panel on each pedal sees the addition of a USB-C socket and a toggle switch to select mono or stereo operation for the input

2. The control surface of the Lex has had a total revamp from its previous four-knob incarnation, adding loads of hands-on flexibility

3. The DIG V2 benefits from a new Tone knob that sets the feedback filter response for high-cut or low-cut (flat at 12 o'clock)

4. Previously awkward to access as a secondary function, adding spring reverb to the sound is now a doddle courtesy of this additional knob on the El Capistan

The two delay pedals – El Capistan and DIG – have had one change to their control surfaces. The most obvious change is to the El Capistan in that, rather than being a hidden secondary function, its spring reverb is now instantly adjustable via its own top-panel knob, meaning that combined vintage tape delay and reverb sounds can be conjured up instantly. The DIG digital delay now gets a top-panel Tone knob for high- or low-cut on the repeats.

Vintage Emulations Enhanced

To anyone that's longed for a vintage Fender amp, the idea of independently switchable tremolo and spring reverb together in one pedal was always going to be a winner, and the Flint presented those options in such a perfect top-panel layout that Strymon felt no need to change it. The designers have, however, provided something for those players who could never get the tremolo to run as slow as they would like – the range has been adjusted to go much slower, down to almost 1Hz. Also new is adjustable reverb pre-delay as a secondary function.

It's probably fair to say that the Deco has always been something of a niche pedal, rooted in vintage studio technology that few players will have used, though all would have heard the sounds resulting from that technology on many recordings. Based on the sound produced by analogue tape machines, it's a pedal of two halves: one footswitchable side delivering tape saturation, the other providing doubletracking. The changes in V2 are an added Tone knob in the Saturation section, which can set the top-end just where you need it, plus there are also now two modes, one for the classic tape sound and a new cassette algorithm that includes a sweet amount of compression.

The Lex is one of the six pedals that has benefitted most from a control surface revamp; there are essential functions available now from the front panel that were not there in the previous four-knob configuration, conferring a real flexibility in getting the sound just right. There's now an output Volume knob that you can use in conjunction with the Preamp Drive, so you can set up a dirtier sound without having unnecessary increase in volume, and there's also a Dry knob to set the balance between the effect and the

THE RIVALS

Where to start with this lot? Well, there are plenty of reverb and delay pedals out there, so how about the Source Audio Ventris (£399) for reverb and the Boss DD-500 (£379) for delays? Another pedal with spring reverb and tremolo like the Flint is Fender's own Tre-Verb (£185), while the obvious Lex rival is one of the Neo pedals such as the Ventilator II (£399) or its Mini sibling (£299). The Deco is pretty much its own thing, but you could get the saturation with an overdrive pedal, and the Keeley 30ms Automatic Double Tracker (£189) offers a variety of different studio-style doubling effects.

4

dry guitar sound for subtle blends or to replicate the Gilmour-ish use of a straight cab combined with a rotary speaker. You also get the option of setting the actual slow and fast speeds separately, plus three toggle-switched options for the speed of the ramp between the two when using the second footswitch for a speed change. In terms of the actual sound, Horn Level and Mic Distance remain as knobs, but you have the option of setting whether the mic is at the front or rear of the cab.

Verdict

There's a reason you'll find Strymon pedals on professional players' 'boards and that's because they are great-sounding, high-quality effects that can do the clearly delineated task. These new versions are still recognisable but with easier and deeper control of important parameters they make dialling in the sound to do those tasks much faster, while opening up a whole world of possibility to anyone who uses MIDI, not least the ability to save and recall your carefully dialled-in sounds. Okay, the price has gone up by around 20 to 25 per cent, but we think the extra is worth it.

STRYMON BLUESKY V2

PRICE: £359
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Reverb
FEATURES: True bypass, MIDI, 1x onboard preset (Fav footswitch)
CONTROLS: Decay, Pre-Delay, Low, High, Mix, Shimmer, Verb switch (plate/room/spring), Mod switch (off/light/deep), mono/stereo switch, Favorite footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard outputs (L & R), standard TRS EXP/MIDI jack, USB-C
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 115 (d) x 60mm (h)

STRYMON EL CAPISTAN V2

PRICE: £359
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Tape Echo simulation
FEATURES: True bypass, MIDI, Tap tempo
CONTROLS: Time, Wow & Flutter, Tape Age, Repeats, Mix, Spring, Tape Head switch (fixed/multi/single), Mode switch (a/b/c), mono/stereo switch, Tap footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard outputs (L & R), standard TRS EXP/MIDI jack, USB-C
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 115 (d) x 60mm (h)

STRYMON DIG V2

PRICE: £359
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Dual digital delay
FEATURES: True bypass, MIDI, Tap tempo
CONTROLS: Time, Time 2, Tone, Repeats, Mix, Mix 2, Mod switch (off/light/deep), Type switch (24:96/adm/12 bit), mono/stereo switch, Tap footswitch, Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard outputs (L & R), standard TRS EXP/MIDI jack, USB-C
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 115 (d) x 60mm (h)

STRYMON FLINT V2

PRICE: £329
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Tremolo and reverb
FEATURES: True bypass, MIDI
CONTROLS: Intensity, Speed, Decay, Color, Mix, Tremolo switch ('61 harm/'63 tube/'65 photo), Reverb switch ('60s/'70s/'80s), mono/stereo switch, Tremolo and Reverb footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard outputs (L & R), standard TRS EXP/MIDI jack, USB-C
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 115 (d) x 60mm (h)

STRYMON DECO V2

PRICE: £359
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Tape saturation and doubletracker pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, MIDI
CONTROLS: Saturation, Volume, Tone, Lag Time, Blend, Wobble, Voice (classic/cassette), Type (sum/invert/bounce), mono/stereo switch, Tape Saturation and Doubletracker footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard outputs (L & R), standard TRS EXP/MIDI jack, USB-C
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 115 (d) x 60mm (h)

STRYMON LEX V2

PRICE: £329
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Rotary pedal
FEATURES: True bypass, MIDI, footswitchable speed change
CONTROLS: Speed, Mic Distance, Horn Level, Preamp Drive, Volume, Dry, Mic switch (front/rear), Ramp switch (slow/med/fast), mono/stereo switch, Slow/Fast and Bypass footswitch
CONNECTIONS: Standard TRS input, standard outputs (L & R), standard TRS EXP/MIDI jack, USB-C
POWER: Supplied 9V DC adaptor 300mA
DIMENSIONS: 101 (w) x 115 (d) x 60mm (h)

Guitarist CHOICE **9/10**

PROS Sound quality; compact size for twin-footswitch pedals; improved control surfaces; MIDI control; 300 presets; mono/stereo configurations

CONS No operational or sonic complaints, but not everybody will be able to afford them

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« BLUEPRINT »

HOT TICKET

Dave Friedman has been building boutique amps for more than two decades – we joined him to learn more about his design process

Words Charlie Wilkins **Photography** Olly Curtis

Over the past 25 years, Dave Friedman has built, tweaked and modded amps for some of the world's most renowned players. A quick glance through the extensive roster of Friedman Amplification reveals a who's who of musicians from Eddie Van Halen, Steve Stevens and Jerry Cantrell, to Richie Sambora, Joe Bonamassa, Dave Grohl and Bill Kelliher.

Although known mostly for his modded Marshall-style high-gain tones, Friedman is no one-trick pony. In fact, his impressive line of combos and heads has plenty of tonal light and shade. Dave joins us to discuss the incredible journey that elevated him to the status of amp guru.

How did you get started in the business?

"Well, I'm a guitar player – originally from Detroit – and I aspired to be a professional player in a touring band with a record contract and so on. I got into gear at a young age and was obsessed with guitar tone. I always wanted to know how to get *that* tone. At some point, I got in contact to ask a question of a guy named Andy Brauer in LA whose name I'd seen in a guitar magazine; he was putting together rack systems for a lot of top players and he also had a gear rental business. After that, we kept in touch and around 1987 I told him I was moving to Southern California. He told me to look him up, so I did.

"He gave me a job carting for Andy Brauer Studio Rentals where I would help deliver and pick up rental gear. Brauer had every vintage and modern amp that you could think of: ['black panel'] Fenders, Tweeds, Hiwatts, Marshall 'Plexis', modded Marshalls... I became very familiar with all the gear. When Andy's main rig builder decided to leave, I was confident I could step in and take his place so they gave me a shot. That was the beginning of my career as a rig builder.

"Andy eventually partnered with Greg Bales who had a music store in Chicago called Make'n Music and they opened a Los Angeles store where we set up shop. While I was there, I got involved with [amp maker] Bruce Egnater. One of our clients brought in a Soldano preamp that Bruce had modded and it sounded fantastic.

"I contacted Bruce and told him if he made a four-channel preamp, I could easily sell it to our clients – so he did. He built it, but we tweaked it together. It became hugely popular with the studio guys and everyone had one in their rack. This is when I really started learning electronics and Bruce became my mentor."

> "I was in the right place at the right time. I had established myself"

When did you actually start building amps?

"By 1993, I had left Make'n Music and got involved with a couple of other companies. I designed the front-end of the Budda Superdrive series amps and the Blankenship Variplex with Roy Blankenship. Both were hugely successful. From there, I made a few hand-built amps for various players and then started Marsha Amps around 2008. But after getting a cease and desist from Marshall, I changed the name to Friedman Amplification."

With so many amps to choose from, why do you think your amps took off and became so successful?

"I was in the right place at the right time. I had established myself as a professional rig builder so I had access to guys like Steve Stevens, Jerry Cantrell and others. When I started building, it was easy for me to get my amps in front of those guys. Obviously, the sound had to back up my pitch to them – but it did, and the amps took off with those kinds of players.

"We also did a deal with Boutique Amps Distribution in 2014 and they now build and distribute our amps. The relationship with them – along with their sales and marketing network – really took us to the next level as far as getting products into big retailers and distribution around the globe. And I'm very much involved with them; in fact, I [still] test and sign every single amp that goes out the door."

"As far as getting into big retailers around the globe, I [still] test and sign every single amp that goes out the door"

Dave's Friedman Pink Taco V2 amp, pictured here, is a smaller version of the BE-100, the company's first production amplifier. This fine example comes courtesy of Peach Guitars, a leading UK Friedman stockist **www.peachguitars.com**

1. Friedman favours Celestion drivers, notably Greenback reissues and Vintage 30s

2. Controls offer classic tones with extra tweakability

3. The BE Mini is a tiny, inexpensive solid-state 30-watt amp that brings Friedman tone to all

4. Dave Friedman has also turned his hand to effects, such as this BE-100-inspired BE-OD Deluxe

5. Friedman's Dirty Shirley amp offers early Plexi-style tones

Where does your inspiration come from for new amp designs?
"Originally, the ideas came from what I heard in my head. Players do sometimes come to me with different ideas, but after you've developed a core sound, so to speak, from there you're just making tweaks and adjustments. For example, take the clean channel from this amp and the dirty channel from another, add a couple of other things, then house it in a different shell.

"Guitar players generally don't want to hear completely new sounds. They want to hear tones based on a set of sounds from the past but with some variation, like more gain or some other added features."

As your business continues to grow, do you ever feel like it's getting away from you?
"I stay as close to it as I can. I still do all the customer service, which means if you email Friedman Amplification, you get me. People love having direct access to me and personalised service."

Out of all the amps you've built over the years, which one are you most proud of?
"It's hard to say because they are all my favourites; they're just different sounds. I would say that the flagship BE-100 is the amp I'm most proud of, but the Small Box and Dirty Shirley are some of my favourites, too. The limited-production Jake E Lee amp [JEL-100 Red Dragon Cartel head] is also a favourite. It's a brutal rock 'n' roll machine, not for the faint of heart. It's bright and it has this 'prang' to it. Some say that it's my best amp ever. We only made 200 units so I know some people are frustrated because you can't get them any more."

You developed small 20-watt versions of some of your bigger amps. Do you have any plans to do a 20-watt Jake E Lee amp?
"Yeah, that's something I'd like to do because people really want it. You can't get the full-sized amp any more, so we'll probably end up doing it. It won't be limited edition like the original Jake, it will be a full production model. I'm not sure when we'll have it out yet."

What do you think is the most underrated amp in your back catalogue?
"Well, I made a clean amp that's now discontinued; it's called the Buxom Betty. It had an amazing reverb and it was great with pedals. A great-sounding amp, but it was loud and people couldn't justify paying $3,000 for just a clean channel. The tone would break up if you cranked it, but it was made to be a high-headroom amp so it would only break up at high volumes. I still think it's a fantastic amp and we would probably make one if someone asked for it."

When you're testing and tuning your amps, what are your go-to speakers or cabinets?
"I use a 4x12 cabinet loaded with modern 25-watt Celestion Greenbacks, a 4x12 cab with Vintage 30s and another 4x12 with a mix of Greenbacks and Vintage 30s. We put together a rig for Jerry Cantrell back in the Make'n Music days and we had a Greenback cab and a Vintage 30s cab setup in our showroom. Jerry played through both cabs together and really liked the blend. After that, I lost track of Jerry for several years, but when he was doing the first Alice In Chains record with new singer Willam Duval, I got involved with setting up a rig for him again. I mentioned to him that several years back he really liked the blend of the two different speakers so we tried it again – and he loved it. So to this day, he still uses the same cabinet configuration when he plays live."

"The JEL-100 Red Dragon Cartel is a brutal rock 'n' roll machine, not for the faint of heart. Some say it's my best ever"

You've done a number of signature amps for various players. Who would you say was the most involved with design and input for their signature amp?

"Steve Stevens, hands down. He was very much involved and his model was also my first signature amp. I've been doing Steve's guitar rigs for years and, early on, Steve was a big Marshall 'Plexi' guy. Over the years, he kind of steered away from that sound a little, so when I approached him about doing a signature amp, I suggested we go back to a 'Plexi'-style circuit.

"There are some similarities between the BE-100 circuit and the Steve Stevens, but they are definitely different. Steve described exactly what he wanted so we spent time tweaking and dialling in the tone to his taste. He would come in, play the amp and then say, 'Hey, can you make it a little more like this?', so I would change a few parts and we'd go from there. Steve came to see me several times during the process and we would go back and forth where I would tweak and then he would play. We did this until we got to a point where he loved the amp."

Who are your favourite music artists and guitar players?

"I'm a child of the 80s, so Eddie Van Halen, of course. Warren DeMartini, George Lynch, Ty Tabor from King's X. If we go back further than the 80s, I would say Jimmy Page, who I'm a huge fan of, Pete Townshend, early Aerosmith. I kind of progressed with music over the years and didn't stay in one spot, so I ended up getting into Alice In Chains and even appreciated Kurt Cobain in Nirvana. I'm also a big Jack White fan.

"There's not a lot of new music that I love. I think we may have passed the heyday of making great records where they spend a lot of time writing great songs with great production and great guitar tones. If you look at the classic songs from groups like The Who or the Eagles, every part of the whole song, from the first opening guitar riff, is a hook. Look at a song like *Hotel California*; it's a masterpiece. I just don't hear music like that being made any more. There are some good new artists out there, but it's not quite the same." G

The MOD SQUAD

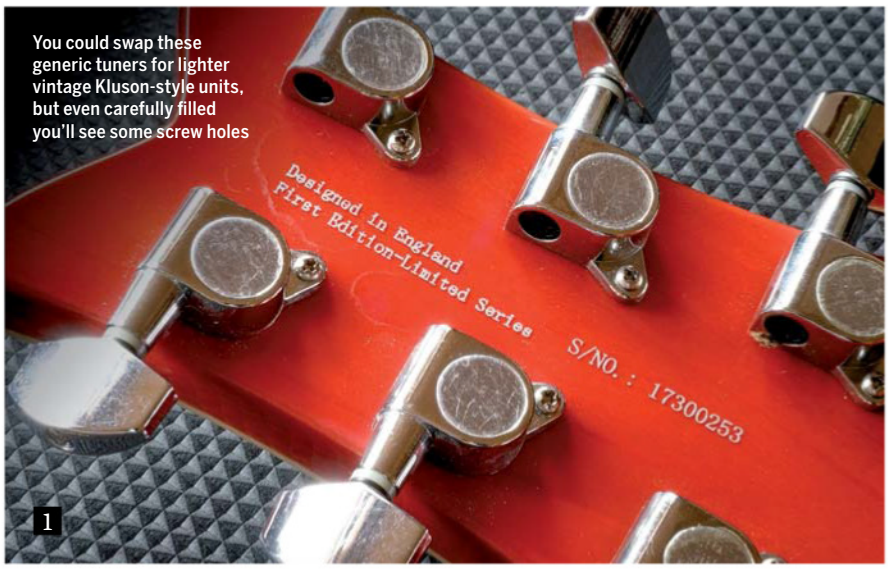
SEMI PANIC!

When a local pro's ES-335 suffers another catastrophic neck break, The Mod Squad offers to help – and Dave Burrluck ends up discovering a forgotten gem in the process

There is nothing worse than a headstock break, apart from when it's happened a couple of times before. A local-to-me pro blues guitarist has long used a late-60s Gibson ES-335 (already repaired on a couple of occasions) and despite pleas from my good self – and said guitar player's family – he was still taking it out on tour. Until, that is, it suffered *another* headstock break. And looking at the pictures it's going to need some divine intervention to fix. I suggested we could probably mod a beater to fulfil some upcoming dates, but as neither of us had a suitable donor guitar, that was as far as that idea went.

The thing is, once you plant a seed it's hard to shake off and so I began to ask around to see if anyone I knew had a semi going for peanuts that I could fix up. I received a few offers but nothing that, a) I could afford, or b) actually inspired me. But then I was offered a bit of a leftfield choice: a Hutchins Chandler 6. A what? Hardly a classic, but I remembered I'd reviewed one some years back and had been quite impressed.

This Chandler 6 is in good nick and clearly hasn't been taken on tour by a hard-rockin' bluesman. The strings are okay and before I do anything else I plug in and am rather surprised to hear some pretty good sounds with definition and depth, even though it could do with a little adjustment here and there. Despite being a 400mm (15.75-inch) wide semi with what looks like a maple centre block, it has a good weight of 3.2kg (7.04lb) – noticeably lighter, for example, than the Epiphone Joe Bonamassa 1962 ES-335 we recently reviewed in issue 491, which came in at 3.96kg (8.71lb). The shiny chrome parts do look pretty generic but should be easy enough to upgrade [pic 1], and while technically an offset double-cut, the neck sits some way into the body, more like an ES-330 than an ES-335, which certainly limits its potential as a high-position soloing machine.



You could swap these generic tuners for lighter vintage Kluson-style units, but even carefully filled you'll see some screw holes

1

> "Deeper investigation and a good setup cost nothing aside from a set of strings and your time"

The Hutchins features a nicely cut bone nut. The fingerboard is a fabricated material called Blackwood Tek

2

When you encounter any potential secondhand purchase, you really need to check the neck and frets are okay. Here, the neck is maple with a rather good profile, a sort of shallow 'C' that's not a million miles away from Gibson's SlimTaper. It measures 42.7mm at the nut – which looks like bone [pic 2] – and the width at the 12th fret is 54mm. Depth-wise, we have 21.6mm at the 1st and 23.2mm at the 10th before the neck curves into a square heel. The frets are in good condition, a good medium/high jumbo (rather than 'vintage') with a width of approximately 2.66mm by 1.4mm high.

Checking them over with a FretRocker, there are a couple of high points and a little buzz in upper positions unplugged (although that's not particularly noticeable plugged in). The fret ends have been nicely rounded, too, and what appears to be a rosewood 'board is, in fact, a fabricated wood-based material called Blackwood Tek that's FSC-approved and advertised as "hugely resilient, strong and stable with a very rosewood-like appearance". Perhaps the biggest difference is the 648mm (25.5-inch) Fender scale length.

The electrics are all working, too: the pickups look like some Gretsch-inspired 'buckers (which certainly match the translucent bright orange finish) with their partially open 'H' covers and dual rows of screw polepieces. Checking the DCRs, we have 8.55kohms at the bridge and 8.4k at the neck, which potentially point to a slightly hotter-PAF output, certainly not

PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK

Now with a 'lyre'-style tailpiece, the Hutchins Chandler 6 is almost ready to gig

QOTSA's Josh Homme on stage with the Echopark Esperanto in 2016

AN INTRIGUING DESIGN

Good luck finding a Hutchins Chandler 6 today, but you can buy a very similar-looking offset semi online for under £200 – or indeed another for $10,000, as I find out...

Back in 2017 I'd been approached by Graham Stockley who was previously with Höfner in Germany, and back then was working with Hutchins Guitars. He wanted to see if we could find some space to review some of their new guitars. One we looked at the end of that year (in issue 428, January 2018) was the Chandler 6, priced at £595. In the autumn of 2017 I'd been dispatched to visit Taylor Guitars and on my way back I picked up a copy of *Guitar World* at the airport, which happened to feature an interview with Josh Homme pictured with what I thought was a Hutchins Chandler 6... It was, in fact, an Echopark Esperanto, a guitar that today lists from $10,000. I really had to look twice: clearly, the Echopark was a classier piece with numerous vintage-y boutique references, but I couldn't understand how it could have the same, or at least very similar, shape with that same pulled-in neck join and identical f-hole shapes.

At some point, I'd also stumbled across another 'Chandler 6' style in the form of Gear4Music's San Francisco "semi acoustic guitar", which is still ongoing for a paltry £199 in Wine Red and slightly cheaper in Sunburst.

Emailing my findings, Graham replied: "That's a lot of money and a very cheap guitar! Hutchins first used the shape as the Chandler about 10 years ago [around 2007] and then I think they were the only ones using that shape. It started out as a short-scale bass first and then they made the guitar. I changed some bits around and changed the pickups and neck profile before we launched it as the Chandler 6. I think there is no exclusive or trademark control [on Chinese builds] so any shape is pretty much open to anyone. We had this issue a lot when I was at Höfner. Two months before we had the first Verythin [Chinese] production, for which we paid tooling and supplied German samples to be copied, another Chinese company had launched their own version!"

In 2018 ex-*Guitarist* staff member Chris Vinnicombe, then editing *The Guitar Magazine*, ran a review of an Echopark Esperanto 313 with a price of £6,899 (including hard case). Again, I couldn't help thinking it was *so* similar to the shape of the Chandler 6. To quote Chris: "Echopark mainman Gabriel Currie began working with Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme back in 2013. 'He commissioned five instruments, three of which were semi-hollow,' remembers Currie, then based in Los Angeles but now building out of Detroit. 'We had the same tastes and leanings sonically so I went to work on a couple of ideas, twisting the design in a couple of ways to make it Echopark. I own an ES-330 from 1959 with a dot neck and it's got a perfect feel. He has a Casino from 1964 that we love, too – it's really a combo of those two with the offset kinda design that is not as wide as an ES-335, not as bulbous, a little more feline...'"

To this day, I have no idea what had gone down. Had Echopark seen that Chandler design and thought, 'That's cool!' and tooled up to make the laminate pressed top and back in the USA? Or was any similarity simply pure coincidence? Either way, it's a design that's ripe for a modding makeover. Can you really take that Gear4Music or Hutchins semi and turn it into a slice of USA boutique?

There's very little range for the saddles to move on this tune-o-matic-style bridge

a Filter'Tron. Another difference here is that the bridge pickup is placed a little further from the bridge than an ES-335, for example, which will potentially give a slightly warmer voice.

Overall, then, it's pretty ship-shape and feels good when played seated. When I strap it on, I notice that there's a conventional strap button on the upper horn, rather than on the back of the heel.

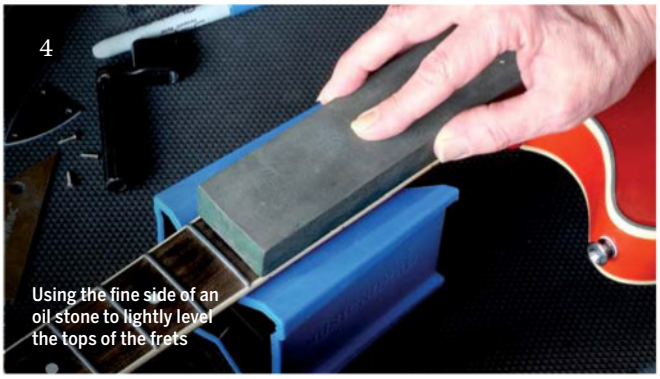
To be critical, the bridge sits a little higher than I'd like – the G string is around 18mm above the top – but it's not a dealbreaker. The saddles, however, all sit at the front of their travel [pic 3], which is one of those things that sets off a minor alarm bell, despite things seeming okay intonation-wise at the moment.

Fine Tune

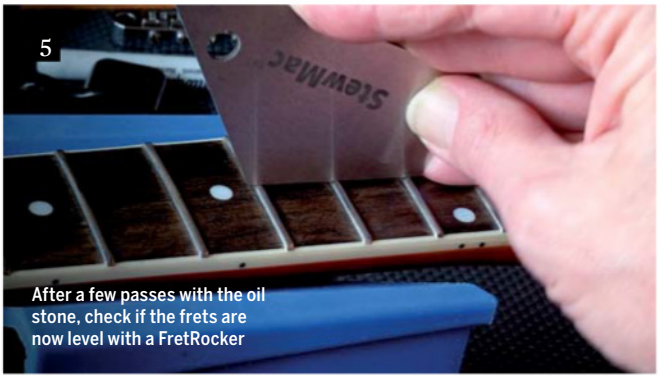
Not for the first time in our modding adventures, I hold back on doing anything while I consider some potential scenarios and outcomes. Obvious mods such as more vintage-style tuners and a boutique bridge and tailpiece, not to mention a set of boutique pickups and a new wiring loom, are all very good in theory. But at a combined cost of close to £450 to £500 – which is on top of the price of the donor guitar itself – I decide to think on.

What doesn't cost anything aside from a set of strings and some of your time is a deeper investigation and a good setup, which would obviously cure those couple of slightly high frets. I've mentioned concerns about the bridge height and

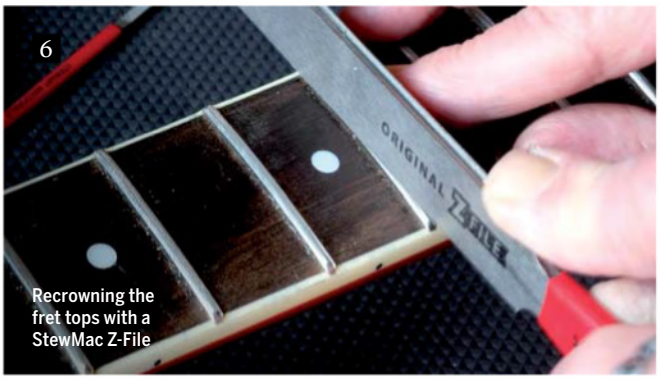
PHOTOS BY DAVE BURRLUCK



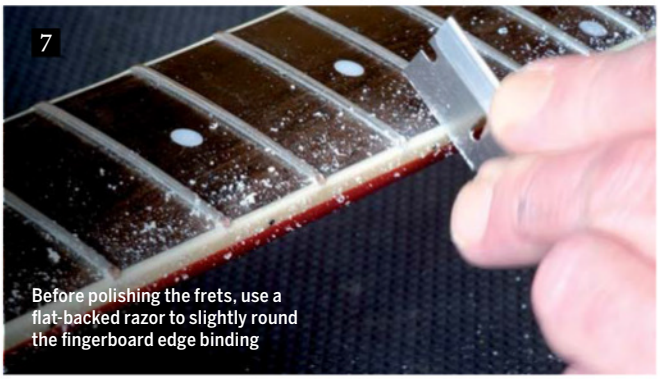
Using the fine side of an oil stone to lightly level the tops of the frets



After a few passes with the oil stone, check if the frets are now level with a FretRocker



Recrowning the fret tops with a StewMac Z-File



Before polishing the frets, use a flat-backed razor to slightly round the fingerboard edge binding

position and, of course, any rewiring is complicated by it being a semi. I need to see if I can get a new loom through the bridge pickup cavity, for starters... And it turns out I can't, so any new wiring needs to go in through the f-hole. Oh, joy.

Whatever the future holds I decide to get going and give the frets a light levelling [pics 4, 5 & 6], something we've covered many times before. While I'm at it I spend a little time rounding the fingerboard edge binding [pic 7], then smooth and polish the frets [pics 8, 9 & 10]. With new strings on I dial in the setup, then finally slightly lower the nut grooves and check the intonation – which is okay, despite those saddles being slightly forward. To be honest, the bridge seems slightly misplaced, and with a slightly lower neck pitch it would sit lower on the body, although there's nothing we can do about that.

Some of those oh-so-cool Echopark Esperantos I've seen use quite a particular 'lyre' tailpiece (see the 'An Intriguing Design' box, opposite, for more), a piece I believe was originally fabricated in Germany and used on Höfner and the like back in the day. Coincidentally, I have an old 'Made in Germany' one in the bitsbox and can't help but fit that.

Boutique it ain't, but as a stage one work-in-progress it's looking pretty cool already, is playing better than it ever did and, importantly, is fit for a try-out at the next band rehearsal. Then, and only then, will I decide if it's really worth investing more time and money. Tone don't come cheap! G

A quick rub with 600- then 800-grit wet and dry paper moving across the frets

Use some 0000 wire wool to smooth up the frets and the fingerboard face. Always mask over the pickups and vacuum up your work area once you're done

Finally, some metal polish and a bit of elbow grease will have the frets mirror shiny. Once done, wipe off any residue with white spirit on a paper towel. You're now ready to fit new strings and dial in your setup

That should give you something to think about till our next issue. In the meantime, if you have any modding questions, or suggestions, drop us a line – The Mod Squad.

Huw Price's **Nitty Gritty**

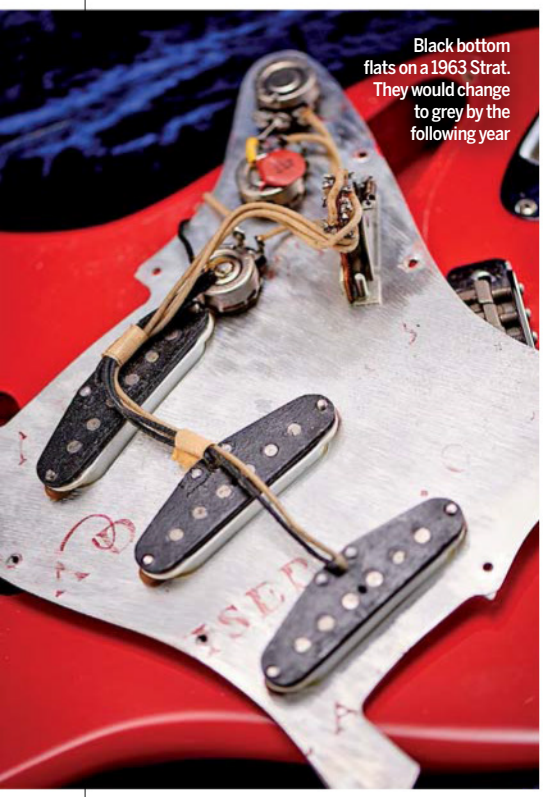
Chasing vintage tone? A pickup swap could be just the recipe for Leo's secret sauce

Vintage Strat Pickups

Nobody can deny that Leo Fender revolutionised the process of mass-manufacturing guitars. Routing out planks of wood to form bodies and attaching necks with screws represented a paradigm shift in 1949. A couple of innovative vibrato designs soon followed, but the fundamentals of Fender guitar construction were in place from the get-go and carried through into Leo's work with Music Man and G&L.

Everything, that is, besides the pickups. Competitors such as Gibson and Gretsch tended to use just one or two pickup designs for all their guitars, but every new Fender model had bespoke pickups that weren't used on any other instrument. Leo Fender's pickup obsession lasted throughout his career, and his approach to pickup design continued to evolve.

The pickups that graced the Stratocaster design when it was launched in 1954 set the precedent. Being a great believer in prototypes, Leo provided Bill Carson with several for road-testing and, according to George Fullerton, the prototype design that went into production was chosen by Bill because they "had the most hair on their chest". Bill Carson also suggested installing four or five pickups on the Stratocaster, but Leo probably demurred on the basis of cost and common sense. Compared with their predecessors in the various T-style models, Strat pickups were simpler and presumably cheaper to manufacture.



Black bottom flats on a 1963 Strat. They would change to grey by the following year

Leo ditched the bridge inductance plate and the metal cover in the neck position. The component parts included two fibreboard flats, six magnetic slugs, two eyelets and a few thousand turns of magnet wire. Even so, Stratocaster pickups made in the 1960s and 70s sound quite different from those made in the 50s, and we can examine the component parts in greater detail to explain those differences.

On The Flats

Leo Fender took an industrial approach to manufacturing and designed components using readily available materials wherever possible. Having started out in radio repairs, he would have been very familiar with vulcanised fibreboard. Also known as 'fish paper' and Forbon, it was commonly used for making eyelet boards for electronic components and had been standard in Fender amps since the mid-40s.

Having also used fibreboard for Telecaster pickups and pickguards, Leo took the same approach for Stratocaster pickups. Two 'flats' were needed, with one on top and a slightly larger one on the bottom to accommodate height screw-holes, and two eyelets for connecting the start and finish wires of the coil to the leadout wires. The flat shapes were stamped out, along with holes for the magnetic slugs. These holes had to be precise to achieve a secure friction fit – and with the slugs installed, the whole assembly was dipped in lacquer to coat the slugs with an electronically insulating layer.

The bottom flats remained black until around March 1964, when they became grey. The grey was retained throughout the 70s, becoming slightly darker along the way. However, for a period around 1968 Fender had supply issues and resorted to using up pre-CBS-era stocks of black-bottom flats.

Although pencil dates on the underside of pre-CBS Strat pickups are seen, they are not the norm. A yellow date-stamp was introduced in 1964 and can be seen on the very last black-bottom and first grey-bottom flats. Hand-written dates appeared in 1966, followed by a black date stamp by the late 60s.

Slug Fest

Unlike P-90, PAF and Filter'Tron pole screws, Stratocaster slugs are permanent magnets. Alnico III was used for very early Strats, but Fender had changed to Alnico V by 1955 and this has remained the default alloy for traditional Stratocaster pickups ever since.

Throughout the 1950s, the north end of the slugs protruded through the covers, but Fender changed to 'south up' around 1960. This is unlikely to influence tone, but it's a useful test when you're trying to authenticate vintage pickups.

In 1954 Telecaster slugs were still flat, but staggering Stratocaster pickup slugs was a big point of difference and certainly gave the sales team something to talk about. P-90s and DeArmonds were regarded as premium pickups during that era, and both had adjustable polepieces. Fender probably staggered the slugs to optimise string-to-string balance without complicating the manufacturing process.

> The pickups that graced the Stratocaster when it launched in 1954 set the precedent

At first the D slug was taller than the G slug because many players were still using wound G strings. Fender responded quickly when it became apparent that plain G strings were becoming the norm and lengthening the G slug improved the balance. This stagger is still used for vintage-style Fender pickups and boutique replicas.

Slug dimensions changed throughout the vintage era. In '54 the diameter was 0.2 inches, but the slugs soon slimmed down to 0.192 inches and were further reduced to 0.1875 inches around the of middle 1962. Magnet diameter influences the shape of the field and so narrower slugs provide space for extra windings and potentially a higher DCR reading.

Brittle plastics on the earliest Strat pickups, such as this 1954 example, were soon made more durable

MODIFICATIONS How to tweak your Strat pickups for better tone

Unlike modular P-90s and PAF humbuckers, the construction method limits the scope for modifying Strat pickups and we have to consider external factors. For instance, replacing rubber tubing around the height-adjustment screws may buy you a tiny bit more treble if your pickups sound a bit dark.

If your pickups sound too bright or harsh, however, ensure that you have a pre-CBS-spec 0.1µF tone capacitor installed, rather than a later-style 0.047µF. For authentic early 60s tones, an aluminium shielding plate will make a Strat sound marginally smoother and less spiky. It's subtle but clearly audible if you have discerning ears, and at less than £20 there's no point in not installing one.

Even Strat die-hards often complain that bridge pickups sound disproportionally thin and bright. That's because it's the only pickup that's not bleeding treble through a tone control. So the easy workaround here is swapping the middle tone control to the bridge pickup by moving the connecting wire on the switch. Alternatively, you can jumper the switch tags for the middle and bridge pickups to share a tone control.

To really bolster the bass and low mids, and raise overall output, a Tele-style metal induction plate can be attached to the bottom of the pickup. Most players opt for the bridge, but it can be done to all three pickups if you prefer. Tape must be applied to prevent the plate from making an electronic connection with the slugs, and the plate has to be wired to ground. Some use glue or double-sided tape to attach the plate, but melted wax works, too.

During 1974 Fender changed to non-staggered slugs and stopped hand-bevelling the edges at the top of the slugs. This tiny change was probably intended to reduce costs, but it alters the magnetic field shape and affects tone.

On The Wire

If you compare coils made prior to 1964 with coils that were wound later, you'll notice a colour difference. The orange-y copper look indicates magnet wire with heavy formvar coating, and darker purple/grey coils correspond with plain enamel coating.

Although the coating is incredibly thin, over 5,000 or 6,000 turns it influences the coil's shape and size, which inevitably affects tone. Plain enamel is thinner than formvar, which equates to a smaller coil for the same DCR reading.

With more space between the wires, formvar coils tend to have different capacitance and inductance characteristics, which corresponds to a strong but clear and bright tone. In contrast, plain enamel coils tend to sound less airy but have smooth treble and full midrange. This remains pertinent because most high-end pickup winders still offer both types of wire.

Vintage coils were gradually wound hotter, starting out around 5.6kohms and averaging over 6k by 1963. There was a blip around 1959 when Stratocaster coils were wound a bit cooler and Tim Mills of Bare Knuckle Pickups reports that "the hottest Fender coils appear from '62 to '64". Clearly, there were inconsistencies and, unlike modern sets, Strat pickups were installed randomly, rather than selected for each position on the basis of DCR.

Immortal Coils

Prior to the CBS takeover, Fender pickups were hand-wound. This doesn't actually mean they were wound by hand because each coil would take about a week. Fender did use coil-winding machines, but the wire was guided onto the bobbins by hand. This process introduces a lot of variables and the wraps are more uneven and randomly distributed than fully automated winding. The tension of the coil also varies. The term 'scatter winding' is often used to describe hand-winding and it's regarded as an essential ingredient for vintage Fender clarity and chime.

Some of Fender's pickup winders were regarded as having a special touch, with Abigail Ybarra being the most famous example. Fender brought her back into the fold to make limited numbers of pickups for Custom Shop models.

Fender's switch to fully automated pickup-winding roughly coincided with the introduction of plain enamel wire and cooler coils. Although most vintage Strat fans may focus on pre-CBS models, it's worth remembering that players such as Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour, Walter Trout and Aynsley Lister have created fantastic tones with machine-wound Strat pickups.

Two eras of tone: a 1956 Telecaster sits next to a 1970 Strat. Soon, Strat pickups would lose their staggered slugs, too

Going To Pot

Unlike Gibson pickups of the vintage era, Fender pickups were wax potted. This means they were dipped in melted wax, which impregnated the magnet wire to solidify the coils and prevent microphonic feedback. Towards the end of the 1960s, Fender started dipping pickups in lacquer, rather than wax. This resulted in very solid coils and a tone that was harsher and more brittle than before. And in some cases, lacquer potting can backfire and make the pickups even more prone to microphonic squeal.

If you tap the cover of any unmolested pre-CBS Strat pickup you should hear the sound coming through your amp. They always tend to be somewhat microphonic, which some suggest enhances the treble shimmer and adds harmonic complexity. It's interesting to consider whether they were always that way or whether the microphony is actually a symptom of wax degrading as the pickup ages.

Some pickup manufacturers are aware of this and can retain a degree of microphony by limiting the amount of time freshly wound coils spend in the wax. It's worth discussing if you're ordering a bespoke set from a smaller company – and if squeal sets in, your pickups can be returned for extra potting.

'Scatter winding' is regarded as an essential ingredient for vintage Fender clarity and chime

Summary

The apparent simplicity of Stratocaster pickups is deceptive and simply combining all the ingredients is no guarantee of great vintage-style tone. The strength of Alnico V magnets may differ from one manufacturer to another. And even if you can get a vintage-correct formulation, you will still need to consider gauss.

Individual winders all have their own style, so one maker's hand-wound coils may sound different to another's. Equally, modern formvar and plain enamel coatings may differ in thickness to vintage types, and years ago the gauge tolerances of the magnet wire may not have been as consistent as they are today. Good luck! G

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Amazon Music, etc. Enjoy

Rod Brakes' Classic Gear

This classic-rock machine has been a mainstay of Gibson's catalogue

Gibson Les Paul/SG Standard

Gibson's debut solidbody line got off to a great start following the release of the Les Paul Model/ Goldtop in 1952. By 1957, however, Les Paul sales had tailed off significantly. Facing stiff competition from Fender, company president Ted McCarty and his design team doubled down on their efforts to come up with exciting, innovative products. Diving deep for new ideas, Gibson surfaced with a plethora of now iconic designs in 1958. Among them were the Explorer, Flying V, ES-335 and electric double-neck guitars (the Double 12 and Double Mandolin). Also that year, the Goldtop was revamped with a sunburst finish and renamed the Les Paul Standard. Meanwhile, the single-P-90 Les Paul Junior and TV guitars changed from single- to double-cutaway bodies.

Easy access to the upper frets was a major selling point, as evidenced on all of Gibson's new designs. The company deemed its double-cutaway Les Pauls to be "ultra-modernistic in appearance and practical in performance", and the dual P-90 Les Paul Special followed suit in 1959. That year, it was renamed the SG Special (SG stands for Solid Guitar) and appeared alongside the similarly rebranded SG TV. These solidbodies were the first to receive the 'SG' designation, but with their rounded double-cutaways and slab bodies they appear markedly different to the archetypal Gibson SG profile that came shortly afterwards.

'Short' and 'sideways' Vibrolas along with Bigsby B5s were fitted prior to the 'leaf and lyre' Maestro Vibrola becoming standard in 1963

Consistently poor sales of the flagship Les Paul Standard and Custom models throughout the late 50s and into 1960 prompted Gibson to cease production of the debut single-cutaway style and return to the drawing board. Although the original Les Paul blueprint would make a return in 1968 due to demand following endorsement by the likes of Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck, what Gibson wanted back in 1960 was a brand-new design – something that would make an impact and claw back the company's success within a rapidly expanding solidbody market.

The first of Gibson's "new" Les Paul Standards were shipped towards the end of 1960 and were followed by the "completely redesigned" Les Paul Customs in early 1961. They appeared alongside each other in promotional literature that read, "thinner, lighter in weight and custom contoured... Combination bridge and tailpiece is a Gibson first – can be moved up or down to adjust tension." This Gibson 'sideways' Vibrola divides opinion, and many players prefer an SG sans vibrato system. Nevertheless, the firm persisted with the idea, later fitting several types including the 'leaf & lyre' Maestro Vibrola, the 'short' Vibrola (with or without a pearl-inlaid ebony block) and the Bigsby B-5 model.

> Easy access to the upper frets was a major selling point on all of Gibson's new designs

In 1961, the remaining solidbody models adopted the new thin, contoured, pointed double-cutaway solid mahogany body styling. Thus, before the year was out, the full-size line-up comprised the Cherry Les Paul Standard and Les Paul Junior, and White Les Paul Custom, SG Special and SG TV (the Special was also available in Cherry). In 1963, Les Paul's name was dropped from the Custom, Standard and Junior guitars as the entire solidbody range was designated SG.

Officially known as the SG Standard from '63, this classic guitar has been famously played by some of the biggest names in rock including Eric Clapton, George Harrison and Angus Young.

The Evolution of the Gibson Les Paul/ SG Standard

1958
Rounded double-cutaway Les Paul Junior & TV; Les Paul Model renamed Standard

1959
Rounded double-cutaway Les Paul Special; Les Paul TV & Special renamed SG

1960
Pointed double-cutaway Les Paul Standard supersedes single-cutaway design

1961
Pointed double-cutaway Les Paul Junior & Custom and SG TV & Special

1963
Les Paul Standard, Junior and Custom renamed SG

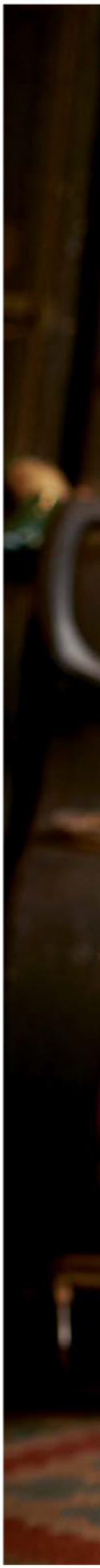
1965
Nickel-plated hardware switches to chrome; nut narrows from 1 11/16" to 1 7/16" or 1 5/8"

1966
Large 'bat-wing' pickguard (no pickup surrounds)

1971
Superseded by SG Deluxe; semi-circular control plate; small block markers

1972
SG Standard reintroduced; 'harmonica' bridge; small block markers

Mid-1980s
SG-62 (first Les Paul/ SG Standard reissue)



Gibson Les Paul/ SG Standard

1. SERIAL NUMBER
Five digits on headstock rear

2. HEADSTOCK
Mother-of-pearl Gibson logo and 'crown' inlays; black nitrocellulose finish

3. PLASTICS
Black pickup surrounds; black pickup/neck spacer; multi-ply (b/w) bevelled edge pickguard; four 'reflector' knobs (two volume/two tone); white switch tip; black switch ring (reads 'rhythm/treble'); white keystone tuner buttons; black/white 'bell' truss rod cover (reads 'Les Paul')

4. HARDWARE
Nickel-plated: pickup covers, Kluson Deluxe tuners, Tune-o-matic bridge and 'short' Vibrola; pearl-inlaid ebony block; two metal strap buttons

5. PICKUPS & ELECTRONICS
Dual humbuckers; two pots (two volume/two tone); two tone capacitors; three-way pickup selector; front-mounted jack

6. BODY
Mahogany; 1 5/16-inch depth; contoured edges; pointed double-cutaway; Cherry nitrocellulose finish

7. NECK
Mahogany; joins body at 22nd fret; 22-fret bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard with pearloid trapezoid markers; 24 ¾-inch scale length; 1 11/16-inch nut width; Cherry nitrocellulose finish

Guitarist **would like to thank Vintage 'n' Rare Guitars in Bath for showing us this 1962 Gibson Les Paul Standard**

PHOTO BY JOBY SESSIONS

Blues Headlines

Richard Barrett is on a mission to make you a better blues player – with full audio examples and backing tracks

Open D Tuning

Tutor Richard Barrett | **Gear used** Atkin J45T
Difficulty ★★★☆☆ | 30 mins per example

LET'S CLARIFY THE TUNING USED before we start. I've gone for classic open D (from low to high): D A D F# A D. This stacks up like an E major chord in regular tuning but dropped down a tone. Using open D as a starting point obviously means the goalposts have moved regarding fretting hand fingering and chord shapes, but what is lost in one sense is certainly made up for in opportunities for chords and melodies that would be virtually impossible in regular tuning. It's also great for bottleneck and can be heard on many old blues recordings.

Rather than break this piece into excerpts, I've transcribed it in full, but it would be wise to break it down into sections as you work on it. The piece switches between strumming and flatpicking, so I've used a hybrid approach wherever simultaneous notes are played. In these instances, the pick takes the place of the thumb with a picking hand finger handling the higher strings. I usually use my third, but feel free to go with whatever is most comfortable to you.

Another option might be to fingerpick and strum without a pick at all, though steel strings can make a mess of your nails pretty quickly when strumming... Some sections are a great exercise for alternate flatpicking through arpeggiated chords – something that can feel counterintuitive at first, but this is the way a virtuoso such as Molly Tuttle (pictured) manages to articulate complex passages with little visible effort or fatigue.

I like to think of this piece as a combination of bluegrass, blues and folk that's influenced by the aforementioned Tuttle and Jimmy Page as well as a little touch of John Renbourn. There is no backing track this time, so the dynamics and tempo are in your full control – one of the advantages and challenges of the acoustic guitar! I hope you enjoy this and see you next time.

Richard Barrett's album, *Colours*, (complete with backing tracks), is available now from ***www.richardbarrettguitar.com***

Consummate flatpicker Molly Tuttle

PHOTO BY ADAM GASSON

Hear It Here

MOLLY TUTTLE & GOLDEN HIGHWAY
CROOKED TREE

Molly is an extremely accomplished flatpicker, with awards under her belt and a solid reputation as a serious player – definitely the 'bluegrass' part of the influence in the demo piece. On *She'll Change* the flatpicked chords are precise and the solo is excellent, *The River Knows* showcases some flamboyant rhythmic accompaniment with something of a traditional folk vibe, while *Grass Valley* has an impressive mix of flatpicking and strumming.

LED ZEPPELIN
LED ZEPPELIN III

Though Jimmy Page deserves his reputation as the king of riffs, there is more to him than that. This album was largely written on 'retreat' in the Welsh countryside, which seems to have influenced the larger proportion of acoustic tracks and mellow vibes. Jimmy's folk, blues and country/bluegrass influences come to the fore on tracks such as *Gallows Pole*, *That's The Way* and *Bron-Y-Aur Stomp* – the latter two being in open G tuning (albeit slightly detuned from 'concert pitch').

JOHN RENBOURN
JOHN RENBOURN

In John Renbourn's debut, released in 1965, he mixed folk, classical, bluegrass and blues and was a big influence on many, including a young Jimmy Page. Check out his deft fingerpicking on *Judy*, *Beth's Blues* and *John Henry*. Many of the tracks here are short and sweet, so while you're at it, why not have a listen to *Plainsong*, *The Wildest Pig In Captivity* and *Winter Is Gone*. If you're going to dive in and learn some of these, bring a capo and some intense concentration!

Example 1

THE FIRST SIX BARS ARE PREDOMINANTLY HYBRID-PICKED, punctuated with a few strums. From bar 7 it's all flatpicked, starting with those alternate-picked ascending arpeggios. For the most part, all six strings of the strummed chords are notated. However, you will find that this isn't always the best practice. A good approach for the strummed sections is to think like a percussionist and accent the rhythms with bigger or smaller strums. To always hit all six strings or trying to be too precise about which ones you do strum would give a stilted result, so feel free to take some liberties and embrace the variety.

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